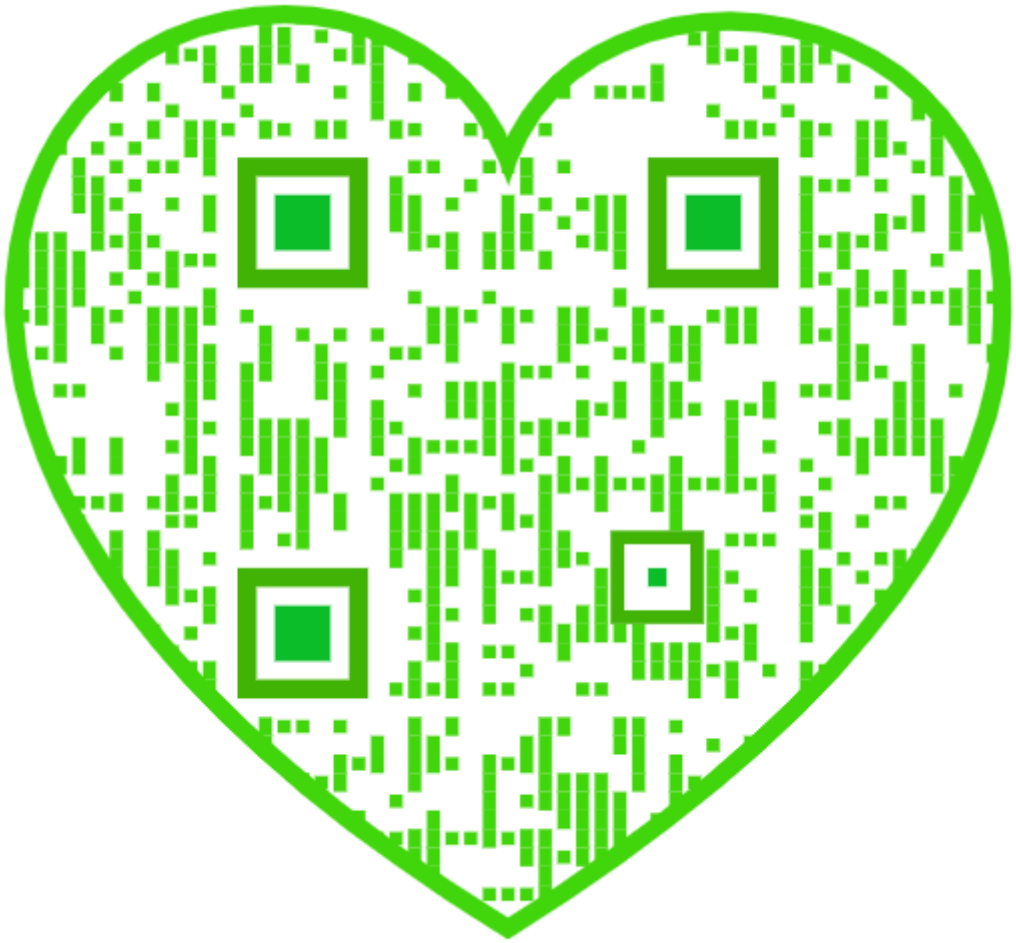

FISHING HOLIDAYS

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BY

STEPHEN GWYNN

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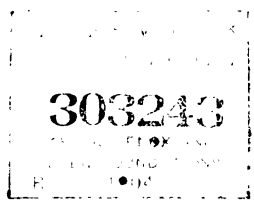

Of the papers contained in this volume four have appeared in magazines: 'St. Brigid's Flood' and 'With the Pilchard Fleet' in *Blackwood's*, 'The Young Fisher' and part of the essay entitled 'Amabilis Insania' in the *Cornhill*; the earlier pages and the title of the essay come from the *Pilot*. The author's best acknowledgments are due to the editors of these periodicals.

PREFACE

WHEN one of these papers appeared in a magazine a friendly reviewer took occasion to complain that it contained nothing particularly instructive. He was perfectly right; and I am afraid that this whole book will lie open to the same censure. It is as well, therefore, to state frankly at the outset that its object is not instruction, but amusement. If any one can derive profit from the record of stupid mistakes which the author himself has made, he will find plenty of them conscientiously set down. But of positive precepts there are mighty few which an occasional angler can give with advantage. Such as occur to me shall be put here, in the forefront of the volume.

My experience extends not far beyond the small rivers and lakes in Donegal, and it extends only to others of the same type in Kerry and Connaught; it is concerned also mainly with the summer fishing. For this fishing my chosen equipment would be always two rods—one from ten to twelve feet, stout enough to manage a five-pound fish without apprehensions of a smash, and furnished with a reel containing not less than sixty yards of light line. The salmon-rod should be of fourteen feet, but the running line tolerably heavy, for the sake of extra power in casting on a windy day. These are the essentials. It is well also to have a big rod, sixteen or eighteen feet as one chooses, for the few stretches of water which call for long casting, and a very light trout-rod for the lakes where neither grilse nor white trout are likely to be met.

In Donegal spinning tackle is very little used, and when used is seldom successful.

The less it is used, the better for the fishing, by consent of all experts known to me.

About flies, a word of guidance can perhaps be usefully given. For the very first of flood-fishing a No. 2 (Limerick) hook may be desirable; but even in high water I should prefer a No. 4 or No. 5, and one day last summer I hooked two grilse on a No. 7 hook in a pool where other men were still using the worm; they had previously refused a larger fly.

The fly in question was a claret, tied by Mr. T. Courtney of Killarney, one of the three patterns which, speaking for myself, I think indispensable. The second is the hare's-ear, and this fly, although so well known, is very hard to come by in shops. It should be tied on a No. 7 or No. 8 hook, being chiefly of use in low water, and should be bushy and striped with gold tinsel. In a very high flood a fly of the same type, but with a reddish tinge through the hare's-ear,

is deadly for white trout; for salmon I have done best with a sort of fiery brown or "crotal" colour. A good variant of the plain hare's-ear is a very small lemon-grey, or hare's-ear with a golden-olive hackle. This fly can be got good from Mr. M. Kelly of O'Connell Street in Dublin; and he also supplies an excellent type of the "blue-bottle"—a common Irish trout-fly, with body of *dark* blue silk, silver tinsel, black hackle, and dark wing. Any one going to fish in Donegal after June begins should have plenty of this pattern in the three sizes—lake trout, ordinary trout size, and small. It is no use in flood-water, but once the flood is clean gone I know nothing to touch it for white trout; and the lake-trout size has often killed grilse for me when they would stir to nothing else.

The big coarse flies for flood-water are nearly always to be got better from some local artist than from the shops. The average

man on the spot, however, nearly always advises the stranger to fish with flies bigger than are to be desired. Opinion in Ireland is conservative, and does not recognise the spread of education among fish. My own view is that on free waters or hotel waters, except when a flood is on, you can hardly fish too small or too fine.

The place-names in this book will, for the most part, not be found in any map, or, if found, not as applied to the places which I describe.

For a last word, I am permitted to assure anglers that Izaak Walton's bag, concerning which the last of these essays is written, though it remains for the present in private ownership, will ultimately be reposited in some public treasury.

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I

AMABILIS INSANIA

I

If there were a copy of Francis Bacon's works attainable—but fortunately in the west of Donegal such appliances of culture are far to seek—it would be interesting to see under which of his heads should be ranked the piscatory illusion. Not one of those I can recall seems to fit, and yet it is a well-marked type of insanity which, curiously enough, infests especially the more civilised stages of humanity. Uncivilised man is content to get his fish out of water in the roughest and readiest way—with a net, with a basket, with a pitchfork, even, as is seen in the conduct of that permanent barbarian, the human boy, with his fingers. Advanced humanity, like the lady in the

poem, "has at will more quaint and subtle ways to kill" (but ways less effectual); it hedges about the procedure with an etiquette of restrictions, as, for example, when it forbids us to awaken the instinct of cannibalism in a salmon by offering to him (or her) the roe of his (or her) proper species. It is only under these conditions and restrictions that civilised man considers fishing a recreation, and under them he addicts himself to it with a sort of gentle frenzy. The French have passed it into a proverb, and indicate amiable idiotcy by saying that a man is *capable de pêcher à la ligne*. And indeed, when one considers the scores of placid anglers who line the banks of Seine and Loire and a hundred other rivers, peaceably waiting upon Providence and the bobbing of a float, while the imperishable hope, defiant of all probability, flickers in their bosoms, it should seem that the French, as usual, are right.

But of all kinds of fishing, and of all kinds of fishing madness, none is a tenth part so demented as the madness of salmon-fishing. Conceive the case of a cook set down to beguile an epicure with delicacies

that bore no distant resemblance to anything that the epicure was in the habit of eating. Conceive the attempt to induce appetite in an elderly *viveur* with a display of arsenical-green sugar-plums or crimson bull's-eyes. The task would be difficult, even for an experienced artist. But to this must be added another supposition. The epicure's digestive organs must be in such a state as absolutely to preclude the idea of digesting whatever he might choose to swallow, however attractive the dish. And not only that. The epicure must also be conceived of as aware, whether from the witness of his own eyes or the inherited experience of his race, that the attempt to swallow green lollipops or crimson sweets served up in a certain very peculiar fashion is accompanied with a sharp pang in the jaw and, possibly, with a brief and violent struggle ending in the epicure's total disappearance from the world he lived in. In short, as the race's experience would probably put it, any one who touches those sweets is liable to be captured and carried off by devils with forks. With these conditions stated, it is probable that the most confident cook would

at once renounce the endeavour. And yet what the cook would stick at, the salmon-fisher solemnly and steadily attempts. That is why he is such a fool.

The salmon, to begin with, is a creature that in fresh water has for practical purposes no stomach. For that reason the natural and reasonable way to take salmon in fresh water is to net them, gaff them, shoot them, drive them into a corner and ladle them out; anything rather than offer a bait to a fish with its stomach atrophied and shrivelled like a deflated football. To go on with, the bait offered to the salmon is, as a rule, entirely unlike anything that he is in the habit of eating in the periods when he certainly must eat consumedly. The appeal is solely to his curiosity, and this is fully recognised in the theory of angling. With trout, who are naturally disposed to rise at flies for business purposes, your scientific angler fishes up stream. His object is two-fold: first, to avoid being seen by the fish (which, of course, is facing up stream too), and secondly, to give the fish the least time possible to scrutinise the lure. The acme of trout-fishing is to bring the fly silently,

suddenly, and directly over the nose of a trout on the look-out for food. In fishing for salmon the whole case is reversed. You fish across and down the stream, dragging the fly with spasmodic jerks through the water, in a way quite unlike the movement of any floating object; and if you know where your fish is, you make it a point to give him plenty of time to see the fly coming. If he takes it, he takes it out of curiosity, much as a child chases and catches a butterfly. If he had a hand, no doubt he would often handle it merely, but, like the child, he desires to taste the unfamiliar, and that is his doom. Again, in any ordinary river, the appeal to curiosity is interfered with by the fact that day after day, year after year, the same appeal has been made in more or less the same way, and many salmon must have seen with their own eyes, whether as fry or grown fish, the awful consequences that befall those who are captivated. Yet so strong is curiosity, so inveterate is the habit of eating, that salmon will risk not only a certain indigestion—for the salmon who swallows anything in fresh water must suffer the worst torments of

dyspepsia—but also terrible martyrdom ending in apotheosis by the medium of the gaff. Accordingly, the fact is undoubted that salmon will take the fly upon occasion, and even under certain very rare combinations of circumstance will rise as freely as hungry trout. Perhaps it has all been arranged by the higher powers in order to perpetuate a delusion which hurts no man and very few salmon, and is upon the whole a most amiable insanity.

These reflections naturally arise from a week's fishing. The bitter experience of two summers in which I, a Londoner with little choice of seasons, had flogged much water ineffectually, always in the wrong week, left me all but resolute never again to touch a salmon rod, but to confine myself to the pursuit of trout, who were at least creatures with a healthy appetite that must be gratified some time in the twenty-four hours. But there was the river in flood, and though accounts were not encouraging, still it was Monday, and on the Saturday a fish had been killed. A relapse was all but inevitable; I fished, and before lunch-time a grilse was on the bank. After that,

reasoning went by the board, and for the whole afternoon one fished with the active expectation of a rise in every pool; a few white trout were sufficient to entertain the illusion. Next day was a long day's thrashing across wind, as tiring exercise as can be found for men out of practice, and by the evening, when I returned with a couple of inconsiderable trout, the bloom was off the sport. Still, my companion on the river had got a good fish, and I had had my chance, for there was a salmon that straightened the line. On Wednesday the river was not swelling visibly, like the shepherd in *Pickwick*, but rather dwindling before my very eyes; a second time I came back empty-handed, and was ready to depart. Then happened one of those things which are to the salmon-fisher what upon certain days the fly is to the salmon—causes of a total suspension of judgment. It rained all Thursday steadily, and on Friday morning the flood was roaring full at breakfast-time. Opinion was divided whether at ten the river was fishable or not, and in the first pool and the second nothing stirred. Then came a long swift run ending in a deep

round hole where the river turned a corner, and as I went up the bank I saw a fish roll in the run. The moment my fly was over him he came, the line straightened, and then fell slack. Only a salmon-fisher knows what the feeling is; and I was convinced that luck had departed for ever. Still, one went on. Twenty yards lower in the same run, and not five casts later, a fish took the fly as it was lifted from the water; ran, leaped, and then headed in under the bank that was undercut by the current. Before he could be coaxed out, he also was off. This is a public confession of incompetence, for better fishing should certainly have secured one, if not both, of those fish; and if there is a more disagreeable sensation to begin a wet day on than a sense of incompetence, it is not known to me, especially when the gillie shares it. There were still twenty yards of the run unfished, and I fished them resignedly. Just where the run entered the turning hole a third fish rose—the third in ten minutes. Whether it was he that came back or another I cannot say, but after the due interval I fished for him, and then came another rise a few

yards off the spot, then another, and this time we got him. I had hooked three salmon and had five rises within a quarter of an hour and fifty yards of water. The pool was by no means fished out, but I was asked to go higher up as a lady was anxious to stay on the nearer stretch of water, so I moved up stream to a fine open throw with a run at the head of it. Waiting for a cloud, I put my flies over the stream, and was promptly into a sporting fish of about six pounds, which fought far harder than the other larger one. It was then half-past eleven; the fishing had lasted about an hour, and I had two fish on the bank. If a telegram had come summoning me for any earthly consideration, it would hardly have been obeyed. Last year a man had caught eight fish one day in that river; there was no reason apparent why one should not get ten, as had been done the year before, or even twelve; or why not pass the score, as an angler had passed it on another very similar stream in the north of the county. However, when the next two pools yielded nothing, though fish were on the move, matters looked different, and the

upshot was that after twelve o'clock that day neither of the two rods on the river touched a fish. Yet the conditions were to all appearance unchanged, the water especially being, if anything, more like the ideal thing as time went on.

Still, the fact remains that within little more than an hour I had hooked four salmon; and I am now irrecoverably relapsed into the delusion that salmon-fishing is a reasonable pastime. Another time they may come and there may be no disasters; and yet another time and the rise may last all day instead of a bare two hours. With what days of monotonous thrashing over water this error will be expiated every salmon-fisher knows—days which might be pleasantly spent with a light trout rod, catching perhaps a dozen, perhaps two or three dozen, of the nice brown trout that swarm in every lough and stream in Ireland. But in my heart I know that the case is hopeless, and to the end of my days the memory of that hot corner on the Glen River will nourish the inextinguishable hope, all the more surely because I did not on that occasion fully profit by my good fortune.

II

IT is fairly conceded, then, that while every angler has a craze, the writer of these pages and every other salmon-fisher is seriously demented. *Quem Deus vult perdere*—we all know the proverb. And yet, if Providence wished to make a happy man, what better gift could be laid in the cradle than a quiet-going hobby? Ask Mr. Shandy; recall the case of my Uncle Toby. It is a poor spirit that will not justify its own pleasures, and one may try to prove that even the fisherman is not such a fool as he looks.

Let me not, however, pretend to pluck the heart out of the angler's mystery. And in truth none of us, I think, could divulge it if we would. As in most mysteries, the initiated know the rites, the adepts more fully than the novices; but they only know in reality what they do; what makes them do it, is at best a conjecture. Was there ever a fisherman, I wonder, who has not asked himself time and again what ever brought him into such a preposterous pursuit?

Leaving, then, to Dr. Max Nordau, Professor Lombroso, or some such specialist, to

dissect and determine the psychology of the angler, I pursue my own much less ambitious purpose—which is, merely to set down the things that rise up in my mind when I ask myself why it is that, year after year, my notion of the perfect holiday, and I would almost say the perfect pleasure, associates itself more and more with fishing.

When Mrs. Battle spoke of the virtues of a square game "*she meant whist*"; and so fishing, in my inner consciousness, always means fishing with a fly. But the man who would limit his sympathies to any single branch of the pursuit is scarce worthy to be called an angler; his heart should go out to the taking of fish by any creditable method —and even that qualifying clause should receive a liberal construction. Poisoning rivers with spurge is abhorrent to every decent mind. Killing fish in a pool with dynamite is little better, though, in a whisper, one may own a wish to see it done, just once. But spearing salmon by torchlight, although reprehensible in itself —especially if the fish are spawning—is a sport that must rank with the finest, and not many of us can read the chapter in

Guy Mannering which describes it, without regretting the days when such things could be done unblushingly, even by sheriffs. And net-fishing of all kinds has a fascination purely its own. There are not many better moments than those when you fetch a trawl in over the boat-side, and the catch comes partly into view, before the joy begins of disentangling it from the lumps of kelp, stones, and other rubbish, animal and vegetable.

A great part of the charm of fishing consists surely in the strangeness of the element we work in. It is as if you threw your line or net into another world, and brought thence by subtlety its remote denizens. One may fetch a bird down out of the sky, but the quarry is, after all, a kindly creature of the earth as much as deer or rabbit ; it lives on the same plane as we do ; blood is warm in its veins. Taking the life of fish is not the same thing ; there is less hint of killing about it. This may sound unreasonable, but any sportsman knows that if each head of game had to be killed by hand after the gun had done its work there would be fewer enthusiasts for shooting. As it is, we know that it is possible to drop

hare or pheasant clean dead, and we hope to do it. But, though every trout and salmon has to be knocked on the head, yet few of us feel repugnance to doing so; while the least squeamish dislike the necessity of giving the *coup de grâce* to a rabbit.

One reason, of course, for such lack of fellow-feeling is the silence of these aliens. A caught hare can wring our heart with its crying; but the fish suffer, if they do suffer, dumbly. *O mutis quoque piscibus*——. If Melpomene could indeed have given utterance to fishes, she did very well to abstain. She may perhaps rain influence among them; may inspire threnodies for the aged trout who at last succumbs to a minnow, or pæans of victory over the spring fish that with one wild rush and leap has burst the confining tackle. But at least, if such emotions there are, Melpomene secludes from us the expression of them. And the fish that escapes gets clean away; it seems clear that even a hook in his jaw is only a temporary inconvenience, perhaps a glorious decoration, like the German student's slit and plastered nose. One need not be haunted by the thought of wounded creatures that creep into some

corner to die; and my only moments of remorse have been when some unlucky little pinkeen of a trout or salmon fry has swallowed the hook (never meant for him) so deep that in dislodging it I have injured the creature badly, and seen it turn tragically belly upwards when it reached what should have been the safety of the water. But that remorse would never have touched me had I discerned him past recovery, and pitched him into the basket to bestow on some small urchin met by the wayside.

It is a fine question, and one that goes deep into the metaphysics of angling, whether it is better to fish for the seen or the unseen. Your dry-fly expert, of course, has no doubts; for him, as I understand, fishing is a kind of stalk. He goes to the river, marks his fish rising, and then warily proceeds to angle for the creature. We, in the country where I learnt the business, walk more by faith; we fish where trout should be, with the flies that they are likely to fancy. And though the other procedure sounds (and is) more skilful and more delicate, yet half the charm of angling lies in its uncertainty, its wide field for expectation, and this to the dry-fly fisher

must be narrowly limited. Moreover, we of the simpler, more primitive method have a great variety of resource. To begin with, we also note the rise, and fish over it with care and with expectation; but if rise there is none, we rely on judgment and experience. We know by practice and by instinct where a trout should lie, and we fish there; and many of us would gladly argue by the hour whether it is more delightful to try an unknown river for the first time, or to whip over one where every stone and every break in the water is familiar as the face of a friend. In the first case, ours is the joy of skilled conjecture; in the second, that of skilled knowledge. A jutting bank, undercut by the current, an overhanging alder-bush, are welcome sights if they only arouse anticipation; perhaps more welcome still if they awaken memory of the trout we caught there, the trout we rose, the great fish we once saw rising which in all probability should still be in his fastness. And in any case judgment must come in to help memory; fish shift their places according to the height of water, and you will get a dozen good rises one day in a run where with the stream a

foot lower—as it will be next morning—it would be useless to throw a fly.

There is, again, the choice of flies. We are no entomologists in Donegal, though I make no doubt but the skilled dry-fly fisher might, by attention to the fly on the water, get trout that we should never stir. And yet even the May-fly, when it is up, has little attraction, and other patterns kill better. The choice to be made ranges within certain small and well-known limits, and is largely a choice of sizes; it is the main point where skill tells on a lake; and that is why lake-fishing, although generally more prosperous, is so infinitely less attractive than fishing on a river.

On a lake the water is all the same before you; barring the chance of a fish that rises "to himself" within reach, you may as well throw right as left, and the merest novice can soon compass all the skill that is required to drop flies down wind light on the water. There is nothing in all sport duller than lake-fishing on a bad day, though few things pleasanter than an afternoon in the boat when trout are taking free, and there is the chance of a bigger one than common

to keep expectation on the stretch. For then it is no simple monotonous continuance of easy undiscriminating casting; skill has a hundred chances in the quickness of the strike that is yet not too quick nor too hard; in the manœuvring of hooked fish that must be kept clear of the boat, and, if possible, clear of weeds; in the judgment that teaches you to use strain enough lest precious moments should be wasted, yet not too much lest the tiny fly should tear away or the delicate gut snap. There is room and to spare for difficulties.

Difficulties are of the essence. If it were too easy to catch fish, one would not trouble about catching them; and here where I write in North Donegal we suffer a little from that misfortune. There is a lake ten yards from my feet in which any reasonable angler could kill, on this day of cloud and westerly wind, as many herring-sized trout as would make him illustrious if he got them on a brook in Devonshire. But when one has come out to fish for salmon, small trout soon cloy, and there is the sad knowledge that the only difficulty is to beat a record for numbers, for there is no use in hoping

for size ; a pound fish is here almost unheard of. If there were no salmon within reach it might be different, but half a mile off is the river—or what is left of it—and there, sulking at the bottom of deep holes, are the unattainable salmon. For in this most annoying of summers, while London was enduring deluges, Donegal, like the most of Ireland, suffered a drought ; and now rivers are in that condition when the wise man knows he might as well fish in a field. And so one sits and watches day after day of cloud and westerly breeze go by, and prays for a flood that comes not. The brown trout are in the lakes, and I know that any day I could catch from two to four dozen ; and, knowing it, leave them uncaught. The element of uncertainty is not sufficient, and the lake on which I might get a two-pounder is ten miles distant.

Let us reduce these data to principles. One would argue that there must be, first of all, the desire to catch fish, since the reason why I sit and write at present is that for the moment small trout have lost their charm by the side of a visionary salmon. The thing is too easy : expectation of catching

as many as I want becomes a certainty; and I suppose that in certain regions of the world one might grow equally *blasé* even with a larger class of fish. On the other hand, it is quite clear that expectation must not sink below a certain point; however desirable the fish, there must at least be a reasonable chance of getting it, and to-day it would be simple ignorance to fish for salmon. And yet I would not say but the afternoon might see me on the river.

The precise point at which hope dies in the fisherman's heart is hard to ascertain, but that point marks the moment when fishing ceases to be a pleasure in itself. There may be, and there often are, other circumstances to make it pleasurable to be on a river; but once hope is gone, the exercise of dexterity in casting is a poor substitute. I reasoned all this out clearly to myself one afternoon this spring in Kerry. On the Monday I had travelled down to Killarney and beyond it, and had driven up long miles through a bleak ravine far into the hills till we topped a pass and came down into a valley that seemed almost as high among the mountains as Davos Platz, so steep did

Carrantuohill tower above it. I had been greeted with the welcome news of salmon taken, and on the Tuesday I had fished for some hours in hope, with a north-westerly wind (in my face) almost blowing the rod out of my hands, and frequent lashes of cold rain. Never a sign of fish had I seen, but another angler returned with a fine salmon and news of other rises. Next day I had gone up and fished—on the most perfect-looking stretch of water, narrow between high cliffs—and again rain and wind had beaten on me, my rod was a burden, my shoulders ached, and I had seen nothing. We set our face for home, for the whole stretch of river was at our disposal after three o'clock and I had one pool of my beat unfished—a long range of flat water, perhaps two hundred yards of it, lashed into waves by the fierce gale. My mackintosh was lashed into waves also, the rain had found a way down my back, and I had the most perfect conviction that no fish were in the water. It was then that I reasoned to myself that, although there was always a chance, and three hours were left to fish in, I had ceased to believe in the least ghost of

a hope, and that under such circumstances fishing was a slavery. I would finish the fifty yards that remained of the pool, and then, however my gillie might remonstrate, home I would go. And then, just as I had reached this laudable decision, came a heave of something pink-silvery in the grey lash of water; down he went, and the line with him, as I heard Micky's jubilant shout, "There he is!" and "You're into him!" The next moment the fish had run in towards me, I had run back, tangled the skirts of my waterproof in a brier-bush and subsided to the earth. Happily, however, even in this ignominy, I kept a tight line, and in five or six minutes of hard holding—for the bottom was all foul with snags—I had the fish wallowing on his side. But the bank was high, my gillie was nervous about reaching down, and I had to tow the creature along, past a threatening sally bush, to a handier port of access. He lay like a log on the water; I could see my fly in his mouth, and could feel my heart in my own; for it was five years since I had got a spring salmon, and of all experiences the most heart-breaking is to lose a fish that has

been thoroughly played out and see him drift for a moment keel uppermost before he recovers his activity and disappears for ever into the bottom of the pool.

This time, however, there were no such disasters; and I need not say that after this I fished every inch of the water home, and I did not suffer again in Kerry from that heart-breaking despondency, though I only got one other fish in the week, and had to go away—*mo thruagh*—before the real sport began.

But in Kerry there was a full share of those subsidiary pleasures which, hardly less than the pursuit itself, endear the business of fly-fishing. Beautiful country to begin with; the glen sloping down from the peaked mountain, and, as it sloped, doubling into sheltered sides, where oak scrub and birch and hazel grew thick, making lovely mixtures of brown and purple, with no touch of green as yet, except about the fringes of them, which were studded thick with shining holly. And, for a greater charm still, there was good companionship, such as seldom fails one on the water in Ireland. An Irish peasant, once you get

over the barrier of shyness, is almost always sympathetic even if he is not witty; and one who has long been mixing with another class than his own, if he is not spoilt in the process, becomes in his own way an accomplished man of the world.

In Gleneglish my friend Micky's station was that of boots at the hotel. But in twenty or thirty years there he had spent long days in company with a great variety of persons from Lord Randolph Churchill downwards, and appraised them by no means altogether as fishermen. At the first meeting one saw a large, quiet, rather stolid man, clean-shaven, with just a trace of the traditional side-whisker; but you would not talk to him long before you noted the twinkle in his eye. And as soon as we had started out he began the conversation, like any other well-bred person in Ireland, by suggesting mutual friends. He had known my brother, and therefore—Irish fashion again—knew all my kinship, and could tell me of this and that cousin or uncle. My own particular hobby, however, was novel to him, for I wanted him to talk Gaelic to me, and Micky, though he knew

the Irish far better than English, could not conceive "why any gentleman would bother himself with such a useless language." This opened a wide field for controversy; and if we did not convince one another, I soon perceived that Micky talking Irish was a very different person from the English-speaking Micky. Micky in English was a little difficult to keep off the well-worn track of old anecdotes which some previous fishermen had told—tales of the cleverness of parrots, the cunning of Jews, or the like of that — for Micky had the tenacious memory of those who neither read nor write. But Micky in Irish was a person with his head full of queer old scraps of verse and proverbial sayings. I met him one day coming after me when I had been out alone for a forenoon, and the smile wrinkling the corners of his eyes. *Is fada do shlat gan bradán*, "It is the long rod you have with no salmon," he said, humming the words to a tune. "What song is that?" I asked, and learnt it was the beginning of a "rann" or contemptuous epigram which "some poet" had made on his enemy when he met him coming home empty-handed

by the river. The rest of the verse had no special application to me, for it condemned the beggarly little hut and miserly pigs'-potatoes of Donough the son of John out of Deelish ; but the first line I heard plenty of times from my friend Micky.

As is always the way, it was hard enough to disentangle the meaning of these quotations, for the point of them was apt to lie in an ambiguity. One poet would come into a fair and go into every booth chanting a verse that no one could tell the meaning of till he would meet another poet who would catch the riddle and improvise an answer. And many times I was no better off than the uninitiated—worse, indeed, for I could hardly distinguish the words, and Micky was always loth to explain. "It sounds very stupid in the English," he would say ; and reasonably enough, for there was often a play of words involved, or some such ingenuity.

These poets hardly ever had a name, though, like every other man in that county, Micky had tales in plenty of Owen Roe O'Sullivan, the last of the famous Munster bards. Once, however, when we began to

talk about O'Connell—or, as they still call him there in his own county, "the Counsellor"—he branched off into a tale of the Counsellor's aunt, who was a great poet, and he quoted to me the "keene" she made over her third husband, when she overheard the other women scorning at her.

They are laughing at me, the women over yonder;
For me crying so sore:
They say it is a wonder for one to be crying
That would go a third time to the altar.
I was married once to a rich noble,
And I was married a second time to a man of great store—
And it is handsome men they were;
But they died, and little I grieved for them,
Little I grieved for them or for any,
Till he died that is lying here in his coffin.
He has taken away the key of my heart,
And the lock is rusted with my tears.
I have children and I have store of cattle.
I would they were all gone from me, and he to be back.

That is about the drift of it, for I forgot to get it written down. None of the poems were of any great interest, but what interested me was to find that Micky, who in English lived entirely in the prose of things, should have a head full of scraps of song. Doubtless he remembered them from no special predilection, for he seemed to forget

nothing; but still, English poetry and English literature was a sealed book to him, and in Irish his mind was deeply coloured with imagination.

I had an odd illustration of this. Micky, like all the world in Ireland, was familiar with stories of Finn MacCool: a little way up the glen was a rock with which Finn had made one of his giant casts. But of Ossian, Finn's son, he knew nothing, till I told him the story of the fairy woman, Niav, who came to the last feast of the Fianna, and lured Ossian away to Tir-nan-og, where he lived with her till the humour took him to return; and return he did, for all her saying, only to find his comrades dead and forgotten, and the fine country of warriors destroyed with monk and bell.

Two or three days later I was fishing before lunch in the big pool near the hotel; and there I stirred a fish, but could not induce him to rise again. While I was trying, another angler, who had a stretch of private water lower down, came past, going back to lunch, and I decided to go in with him and try again later. However, at lunch I was invited to drive down by road

and inspect this lower water; and having decided to do so, I explained the arrangement. Micky looked disapprobation and answered in Irish, saying, "We will come back like Ossian in quest of the Fianna." But, since this conveyed no meaning to me, I judged I had misunderstood, and since I did not want to argue, I asked no more.

We went down accordingly, and walked up, fishing a little on the way, so that we reached the boat pool latish. I fished the run fruitlessly, and, seeing that the water had risen, said that the fish had probably moved up stream. "And wasn't that what I told you?" said Micky. In righteous anger I protested he had done nothing of the kind. Micky, still more indignant, retorted: "For what would you want to go down the river? Didn't I tell you we would come back, like Ossian, and all our friends would be gone?"

There in a nutshell you have the difference. Figurative expression in English was far from Micky's habit. But once Micky began to talk Gaelic, figurative expression became so natural that he could not conceive of any one stupid enough to fail of

understanding it. It is a lasting regret to me that I was so stupid, for I might probably have hooked the fish; but the regret has served to fix in my mind a fine concrete example of the relation between language and habits of thought.

It is partly these subsidiary attractions that make me *capable de pêcher à la ligne*, and I submit them as extenuating circumstances in mitigation of the psychologist's verdict. But to anglers I need not say that the charm of angling lies in its essence, not in its accidents; and the real excuse for this essay, and, indeed, for the existence of this book, is that angling is a delight which dwells in memory, and memory likes to be revived. Not the least of the pleasures which I owe to fishing has been the pleasure of reading those writers who have written readably about the sport; and I hope that perhaps some one remote from lakes and rivers may glance over these lines and remember, with sympathy rather than with envy, the smell of bog myrtle, the whispering of the reeds, the lush growth of grass in the waterside meadows, the trout's quick rise and the tightening line; and may dream, as

I even here am still reduced to dreaming, of the keen expectation on the bank of a stream in order where the rushing current spreads and slackens to a curl ; of the thrill as a sudden swirl boils in the water, and of the heavy downward plunge when you feel the hook go home.

II

BY IRISH WATERS

THE most characteristic institution in Ireland is the outside car, which can be built for five-and-twenty pounds, and will carry (at a squash) seven persons. One need not affirm that it is the most comfortable of all conveyances, though we who are used to it, and have learnt the difficult art of retaining a rug in position round the knees while seated sideways, are as well pleased with it as any other; but it is emphatically the poor man's carriage. That is Ireland all over. Existence arranges itself very commodiously there for people of small means, and they can get a lot of fun for very little money. Sport is not as free as it was, but there is still a great deal of free sport, and a great deal more of sport that can be had for very small cost, because game-preserving cannot be rigidly

enough enforced to tempt the rich Londoner. If the effect of land purchase be to break up the big fishings where these exist, I for one shall not be sorry, nor expect to see a great reduction of fish. The best river and the least poached that I know is one where for nineteen and a half miles out of a course of twenty every man along the banks may fish when he likes, subject only to the control of the conservators.

At all events, as things are now, Ireland is no place to go to in the expectation of big fishing, except on the few famous waters, about which I know nothing. But for the man who takes his chance of salmon and trout on a holiday as cheap as Normandy or Switzerland can offer, among scenery not less beautiful, Ireland is the place; and for whoever likes the easy-going friendly way of life, and the pleasant courteous people, it is the place of all others.

Of all the desirable haunts that I have frequented in Ireland, Gleneglish seems to me, on the whole, the most desirable. Most visitors are summer guests, and know it as a place where limitless small trout can be taken in one of the little lakes under the

Reeks. Here the historic wager was laid and won, and might probably be won again to-morrow. A gentleman backed his dog for a sovereign to catch a trout in the lake, and the bet was promptly taken. The dog, a fine retriever, was put in the boat, rowed out some hundred and fifty yards and bidden to swim ashore, which he did obediently. But before he started a good length of casting-line had been attached to his tail with flies on it, and very naturally he came ashore trailing two or three trout behind him. There is nothing wonderful in the performance; where I write, at Ardcolumb, in Donegal, on any favourable day in summer the same trick would come off.

Of the lakes of Gleneglish I saw nothing; I knew only its mountains and its river, and its pleasant peat fires, and pleasanter welcome in the little inn; yet that was enough to fall in love with. There was perhaps too short a stretch of water for the number of rods on it, yet that could have been remedied by driving or bicycling to pools which must have existed somewhere in the six miles between us and the lake whence the river streams, wonderfully clear even for a mountain

river. And yet, mountain river though it be, it is none of your streams that are fishable in the morning and dead low by night. So deep are the pools that for a full week, I should say, you could find them in order after a flood; and no matter how high the water, it is always clear. The river that flows here out of Lough Columb has many of the same merits; but a flood will leave it yellow as pea-soup for a day, or even two days. But at Gleneglish, even when bank high, it was colourless as gin. I had an experience with one fish there which brought that home to me.

He rose in the tail of a run, so far down that, though the current dimpled the top of the water, one might almost as well have had a flat calm, except that it took the fly nicely along. I was fishing, according to prescription, with a local fly — beautifully tied but, to my Donegal notions, three or four sizes too large. As he would not move again, I defied my gillie (who was a fanatic for big tackle), and put up another claret and blue of the smallest size that can claim to be a salmon-fly. To this, with a light cast attached, he came promptly, and then

began a double set of apprehensions. In the first place, I could see every motion of the fish, and every one of his motions was directed to boring down into the bed of boulders with which the river was paved. How one would stand it with really light tackle I cannot say, for then the fish must absolutely be left to take his own way; as it was, I held his nose up a deal harder than I should have done if I had not been seeing all the dangers that beset me. But the worst was that, though we could see the fish, we could not be sure about him. He was quite short enough to be a kelt, and the sun, which had been blazing all the time, struck through the water and showed him silvery. Was it the beautiful silver with an underglow of pink which the fresh-run fish displays, or the sickly white of an ignominious kelt? The prudent Micky could not say, though, as the fight lasted, it became clear that all was right. Yet apprehensive we were still, till he turned on his side and showed a surface that it was a privilege to put the gaff into. Short as a grilse, he (or she rather, for it was a hen-fish) turned the scale at nine pounds.

That is the peculiar agony of spring fishing—the chance that what you hook will be a useless kelt. In the first weeks, I suppose, the chance is at least two to one, later in March perhaps one to two, and by May you are generally done with them, though one unlucky angler this year caught two in the month of July on Lough Drummond in Donegal. And the plain truth is that, for the first months in the year, the inexperienced angler ought not to use a gaff himself, or he will be in danger of committing a crime only less bad than vulpicide.

Two enthusiastic young men, not so long ago, found themselves on an early-running river, in the district between Malin Head and Berehaven; and they set out on the first day possible, full of hope. Their uncle, who watched them go, had himself parted with illusions and expected no luck; but he had neglected a plain duty, and the sense of this rose up and smote him when he met them in the evening returning, not with one fish, but with three. "I say," one boy shouted, "salmon-fishing is splendid sport." "I can't think why you didn't get more last year," struck in the other. Looking at

their radiant faces, the uncle had scarcely the heart to disappoint them; he knew himself also the moral author of this guilt. What was worse, he knew (for the meeting had taken place in the village) that every one else knew all about it. Weakly he hinted, "I am afraid those fish don't look quite right." "Nonsense," cried the youths, "they're salmon. Why, what should be wrong with them?" And yet the glow was dead in their faces; they had begun to remember what they had heard about kelts.

Just at that moment the head and front of local poachers arrived, as is the wont of such worthies, most inopportunely on the scene, and he looked with an inquiring eye at the three long, lank, and slimy corpses which ought to have been on their way seawards, to return, if fate spared them, in three months, valiant, glowing, and desirable. "I don't think these fish look quite the thing, Tom," said the uncle apologetically. Tom rubbed his nose. "I doubt not, your honour."

They dug three graves that evening and buried the victims. But such deeds are ill concealed.

Sorry as I am for those two young men, I am sorrier for another novice of whose defeat I heard. One of my friends was fishing, again in spring, when he espied to his amazement a fine salmon dead and adrift in the river. With the help of his gaff he reached it and brought it to the bank. Decay had hardly set in, if at all, and it was a fish well over fifteen pounds; and there, evident in its side, was the mark of an earlier gaff.

How it came there remained a mystery for weeks, till at last another angler explained the riddle. New to the business, he had gone out; he had hooked the fish and played him, with the usual sickening doubt at the back of his consciousness; and at last, seeing the opportunity, had gaffed him successfully, yet with an unsettled mind. Once the fish was on the bank, doubts redoubled in him. Kelts, he knew, were bright as a sixpence; this fish was silvery all over—small wonder, and it fresh from the sea. He knew they were long, and the more he looked at this one the more to his doubting eye the proportion of girth dwindled. Above all, he had read of

captures of salmon; they had always rushed, plunged, and shot like a bar of silver into the air; he had seen a grilse caught the year before, and it had behaved in quite the orthodox manner and gone through all the tricks. But this fish, which would make three of it, had simply circled sluggishly about the pool, and at last allowed itself to be dragged heavily in reach—and he had gaffed it! Yet that was how a kelt was reported to behave. The more he looked at it, the less certain he could feel that this was no kelt; the more he doubted of his good fortune, the more dreadful grew the thought of ridicule if he were wrong. And so at last, unable to bear it longer, he thrust his quarry secretly into the river and fled home, feeling like a criminal—having in reality killed and thrown away his first spring fish.

There are many morals to this story, but I spare to draw them,—owning, however, that more than once this year at Gleneglish, when I found myself fishing unaccompanied by Micky, I almost feared to get into a fish lest my knowledge should prove unequal to the strain that would be put upon it.

Next to Gleneglish, the pleasantest fishing

quarters known to me are at Clochan in the north-west of Ireland. In one material respect Clochan is more to my taste than even Gleneglish, for it has a sea-pool, and where there is a sea-pool white trout are always to be come by. Most anglers will agree that there is a special charm about a place where every tide may bring up fresh fish, and even in the lowest of low water there is an off-chance. And again and again I have saved myself from a blank day by going down, putting up the finest of tackle, and getting perhaps one fish, perhaps two, that may not weigh over three-quarters of a pound at best, perhaps not even over half a pound, but that run and fight and leap in a way to delight you, and make next morning's breakfast a thing to be desired.

Clochan village lies a matter of three miles back from the Atlantic, but it stands on the slope of hills facing seaward ; and on the right hand of the river valley a great mountain rises, whose outer face is sheer cliff. In the gap you see across a long stretch—some thirty miles of blue water—to the far-off Connaught peaks and shore-line; and the estuary of the river winds in and

in between the mountainous sides. Round the flank of Slieve Lewy another stream comes down, almost precipitously for the last half-mile, yet with a fall so stepped and broken in short cataracts and deep whirling pools that sea-trout and even salmon work their way up. It passes under a bridge some fifty yards before its junction with the larger Glen River, and where the waters meet is the sea-pool, which thus has two separate races of water and two swirling streams in it. Up to this the tide comes and no farther, for just above the sea-pool the Glen River plunges wildly down a brief succession of strong falls, its whole volume of water pent into a width of some fifteen feet, except when heavy rain has fallen, and rocks and passage are all confused in one wild rush.

But when the water is high, an angler will not be on the sea-pool if he can help it; his place is up towards the mountain on the lovely ranges and turning pools of the main river. The sea-pool is known to me chiefly when no other place on the stream was fishable, and it is mainly then that I have tried this stretch of water, and seldom drawn a

total blank. In the deep pool, too, under the bridge of the little river, I have caught good brown trout by careful up-stream casting, but for some reason have never seen in it sign of sea-trout or salmon, though it looks a perfect harbourage. But just where the little river flows into the sea-pool, making a fan-shaped commotion in the water, I have seen again and again the short quick plunge, and heard my reel shriek for a moment as if a two-pounder were on the line.

Why it should be that I have done no good in the runs below this when the falling tide leaves them still with plenty of water, yet with a broken surface, I cannot guess; but some day or other I hope for better luck. Up in the valley, however, to which you climb (for it is a climb rather than a walk) from the sea-level, matters have gone better with me. The Owen Buidhe is smaller than the Glen River, but it runs down less quickly; and three or four times I have abandoned my chance on the bigger water, and come home justified by a white trout of a pound or two when other anglers were empty-handed. Far away up in the mountain there are deep little peaty pools,

and if a breeze hits them, and the trout be there, the chance is not so bad. Yet the best of these pools is associated in my mind with two sad disappointments.

The Owen Buidhe has three levels: first, that of the sea-pool, from which you climb to meet perhaps half a mile of fishing water; then there is another endless series of steep shallows, and beyond that a long, long stretch where the stream, deep now and narrow, winds among bog. It was in the lugubrious autumn of 1902 when no one in Donegal could get a fish, big or little; and we had gone up to fish one of the lakes for herring-sized brown trout, which can, of course, always be come by. A feeder of the Owen Buidhe comes from this lake, and we followed it down to the upper level. Here, after beguiling some brown trout, I came on a somewhat wider stretch, and to my joy saw the swirl of a big fish to my tiny claret —a salmon pattern, with bright yellows and greens in the wing, but tied down to trout size. It was the more joy to get this sea-trout—a two-pounder—because we had left the lake on the chance that a heavy thunder-shower which struck us might have set fish

rising. And having got one, we fished down hopefully, though the sky blackened like ink. Just as we reached the lower level of the river, the rain began to come ; my companion fled to the hotel, I to the biggest of the pools. There I fished in such a tempest of rain and wind as I have seldom felt beat upon me ; streams ran down my back. But I got first one white half-pounder, then another ; and then the big fish rose—and missed the fly. Whose fault it was—mine or his—that he would not come back, who shall determine ? But I had to go, leaving him untouched. Next day we decided to give up fishing and make an excursion ; but our road lay up the Owen Buidhe valley, the wind was high, and I took the rod for a throw. I fished the pool down and there, at the very tail of it, my claret fly was suddenly fast in him—salmon or heavy white trout, as the case might be. Which it was, alas ! I shall never know ; for in a minute or two my fly came out as I was simply holding him, and I missed—if salmon it was, and I think so—my one chance, for that summer, of a salmon.

Good as the fishing at Clochan can be on

occasion, it is not the chief attraction of the place. Hardly anywhere else in Ireland is there scenery of such grandeur. The special fame of it is derived from the great sea-cliff; yet that has never seemed to me so imposing, for all its gigantic proportions, as a certain wild glen, six hilly miles to the north; and for beauty I have never anywhere seen anything so wonderful as was, on the day when I lost my fish, the headland which lies between the cliff and the glen. It is a spot which Leighton haunted, establishing himself year after year in a little white-washed house hedged about, after the local fashion there, with the small-flowered scarlet fuchsia; and whether one likes Leighton's painting or no, there is no denying that he had the sense of beauty. And I have seen high-piled and glorious cloud-backgrounds in his work which, I am very sure, were a memory of what he looked upon as he faced across the Atlantic on an autumn evening.

This afternoon we left our bicycles at a cottage and walked on to the headland, where it projects westward, a broad rounded stretch of grass—grass crisp and clean as it only grows by cliff edges, and cropped to the

very soil by many sheep. Beyond was sea and sea—bays to our right and to our left, and before us the limitless expanse in all its glory. Small cattle pasturing showed silhouetted against the blue — like antelopes they seemed, a part of the wild scene, with no hint of domestication about them. In our ears sounded the wild screams of gulls, and with these, far-off shrieks of small ragged boys at play round a turf stack. We walked on and on over the springy turf, past the small ragamuffins, who fled first, and then followed; each, when we turned to look at him, dropping to the ground, and rolling there, head down like a crouching rabbit, shy and roguish. On and on we went over the expanse of golden green toward the cliff edge. Seaward was the broad field of blue, overlaid, in tracery innumerable, with a shimmering mist of sunlight; at the horizon an undistinguished brightness, neither white, nor blue, nor silver; ethereal, aerial brightness, as of fairy milk. Above was fine-spun cloud weft that grew into gauzy drifts streaming across the blue. Blue was above us, blue below and around; at our feet the unbroken spread of sunlit green; all

vague, all large, till we reached the very cliff, and suddenly detail burst on us—the rock, sun-smitten, black, and savagely grand; stretching out from it, the blue sea, dashed with white; and just under our feet at the cliff's base, green water, greener far than any glass or emerald. On it the mass and swirls of foam swayed back and forward, or were flung crossways by wind and wave; they made a whiteness solid, yet so brilliant as to seem transparent. In a kind of rapture we looked down upon purest white, purest green, purest blue, that eye can behold, wrought into being by the great wash of the Atlantic, working in unison with the clean wind and clean sun of this unpolluted place. But the very heart of the picture was an eddy under the cliff's blackness where blue, green, and white all blended and merged into one indescribable glory of shot colour, such a painter's palette as was never seen on earth.

Turning away at last, we walked on by the cliff's edge, fluted and carved at the top by sharp feet of sheep through endless generations, to a gully out of which whirled up a bevy of black wings from dark shadow into full sunlight; and, as they swerved from us,

sunshine caught the scarlet beaks and scarlet feet of the choughs, making them glow like coral against the sheeny blackness of their plumage. And down below a crevice led to the passage through which, the story goes, Prince Charlie crept daily, and so gained an outward facing ledge of green, invisible save from a boat, where he sat and stared all day at the waste of water, hoping for a French pennant and the sail of his deliverance.

A pleasure like this is not of the eye only; you drink in the taste of the sea like wine, and the feeling of vast unconfined space lifts and expands you. And you can get such pleasure in a hundred places through western Ireland from Donegal to Kerry, with the knowledge that when the grey huddle of cloud comes over the sky, and heather is wet to travel, and your mere sightseer curses the elements, the angler may be out by the river, following a delightful business which brings him into ready touch and sympathy, if he is willing, with every peasant that he meets along the bank.

I may add that it is safe to let any casual spectator gaff your fish. They are all familiar with the implement.

III

ST. BRIGID'S FLOOD

FOUR or five men were gathered together that evening in Forsyth's rooms, talking the usual talk of anglers when they congregate — flies, bait, good days, bad days, droughts, and floods. Forsyth was just expressing his preference for the extreme type of flood river—

"A regular mountain stream, you know —no lake on it, no feeders to speak of, but just the scourings of the hills. When it comes down there's no need to bother about waiting till it clears; you watch till it stops rising, and then fish at once; and some time or other when you're on the water you're pretty sure to hit the psychological moment."

"Yes; but how long does it last?" put in Legge.

"Oh, an hour, two hours, six hours. But it's amusing, anyhow, to watch the water changing; it keeps up the interest—it's dramatic. I've seen a stream at Carrick get up five feet in the night, and go down to where it was in the forenoon."

"If you come to that," said Grayson, knocking his pipe on the mantelpiece, "I've seen a flood get up about five feet in five minutes."

Grayson was a man none of us had seen before. Forsyth had picked him up somewhere in Ireland. So, although what he said sounded pretty steep, none of us hooted.

"You mean a tide wave," Legge suggested politely.

"Not in the least; just a flood out of the mountains like what Forsyth talks of. And if you like them dramatic, Forsyth, you'd have had your heart's content that time."

"Well," said Forsyth, "I know they get the devil's own floods in the West of Ireland; but I don't see how that could have happened in the natural order of things."

"I don't say that it did," answered Grayson; "and anyhow, there were a good many

people thought it didn't. They thought exactly as you say, that it was the devil's own production, or, to be quite accurate, the work of St. Brigid, if you ever heard of her."

"No," said Forsyth; "but expound."

"Well," said Grayson, as he filled his pipe and settled down to narrative, "I'm not strong on saints; but St. Brigid has a lot of sacred places all through Ireland, and just up near Killala there's a well that she's supposed to have blessed. I was staying on the other side of the country at a place called Teelin, in the direction of Blacksod, where I had leave to fish the Bunlin River. It was a pretty wild place, I tell you, in those days; for the nearest rail was thirty miles off, and there weren't many of the amenities of life at the inn. The fishing was no good either; for the place was a regular nest of poachers, and they had scooped out nearly every fish that was in the pools, so far as I could hear or see. I would have chucked it, only for a ruffian there that I made friends with—head and front of all the poachers of the district, by his own story; but he gillied for me in the daytime, and used to show me outlying

streams where I got some sport. And he swore to me by all his gods that the weather was making up for a big flood, and then there would be great fishing in the Bunlin. Besides, he was very good company; so I stayed.

"I liked the people too, and I had got pretty friendly with them, though they didn't much care for strangers. You see, the only strangers who ever came there were sporting tourists, and interfered with peaceable poaching; there wasn't much to bring any one else. My word, but it was a desolate place! Great brown moors sloping down off mountains that had no particular shape, and running into great brown wastes of bog that stretched away out towards the sea. You hadn't even the comfort of looking out to the ocean horizon, for there is a kind of low neck of land that runs between that country and the Atlantic. So you saw nothing on earth but brown shapeless bog and heather in all directions: just a little tillage along the river of course, but practically a bare wilderness of bog. And the valley of the river, so far as my fishing went, ran pretty straight east and

west. It had no surprises or nooks or little prettinesses about it, but was just as broad and bare as a valley can be. Only at the boundary of my water it took a sharp turn, and the river was jammed up tight in a winding cleft. Dan, my poacher friend, was always talking to me about the splendid pool there was just above here; and one day when we were doing no good at all, I left him my rod—he was always mad keen to be fishing himself—and walked up to look at it.

"He said I couldn't miss it, and neither I could. When I got to the bridge—for I had struck back to the road—I could hear the rush of the little fall about fifty yards down, and I walked to it. The river came at an angle to the fall, and then it had a straight swift course of about a hundred yards in a deep confined channel. That day there was a lovely run at the head of it, but in any kind of flood the tail of the pool would be the chance. The place was a regular gorge. I walked down the right bank, which was just a handy height for fishing, but the other was a kind of cliff—you could see the track going up and down

it like a sheep-run. At the end of the pool the sides of the gorge narrowed in again, so that I don't suppose the water was thirty feet across; but just there on the far side the cliff drew back from the bank, and right in by the river was a cottage, a good bit better-looking than most of them. I would have thought it must have belonged to a keeper, only that on my side there was a watcher's hut built of scraws of turf, and presumably put there to observe the man on the spot. I remember thinking as I looked at it that I wouldn't mind being the man on the spot, if I had a rod on the water, for the site was charming. The cottage was regularly in the arms of the hill; and it faced down the valley about south-west, with its gable-end to the river, protected from the westerly draught up the valley by a little knoll. He was probably a 'well-doing' man, too, for just below this kind of gully the river curved to the right, and left a dozen acres or so of fairly level ground between it and the hills. All this was down in crops, cut up with stone walls, and there was only one other cottage near by—a much poorer one, too—so he probably

held most of it. You see, I was taking stock of the place against the time when I should be a tenant.

"All the same, I should probably have forgotten most of these details; only, I fancy, one's memory is a sort of sensitive plate, which takes impressions, but they sink gradually in and fade into a blur unless something fixes them. Well, in this case I had the lines bitten in, pretty hard, just afterwards, in a way that stamped in my mind the position of that cottage, and the fact that the man had only one near neighbour. Just in the same way I am not likely to forget what otherwise would have faded away in a few days or weeks or months—the look of a fellow who came out of the cottage-door and stared at me across the river—a big, burly, dark-complexioned ruffian. I said to myself at once, 'That man's been in America.' You know the type, Forsyth—rather aggressive. 'I'm as good as you anyway'—that sort of air. He was clean-shaven, too; that was another mark, for the men there all wear the beard, or else the old-fashioned scrap of whisker. Well, I went on down stream, and never

gave him another thought; but the whole thing came back on me in a flash when I saw him again—lying quiet enough. That was when the first picture got bitten in and fixed.

"Just in the same way I shall always remember noticing an unusual feature in the landscape—a great massive outcrop of rock on the mountain-side straight above the cottage. It broke the featureless character of the hills, and there was a big patch of that orange lichen on it that caught the sun finely, and it was good to look at. But especially I noticed it because it set me thinking of a man called Bowen, a sort of professor who used to fish with me, and do a lot of geologising and botanising on off-days. He would have been bound to invent some theory to explain why that great lump stayed there sticking out, while all the hill-slopes about were being pared off smooth. And afterwards, when the event happened, I wrote to him to come and look at geology in the making, but he was in the Andes or somewhere. Only, it wouldn't have done for him to theorise in Teelin about what happened. Everybody in Teelin is very

clear that if the rock was there, it was put there with a purpose.

"However, of course, the day I was up there I was thinking of nothing except that the pool was a splendid holding pool, and that a man might possibly kill fish in it even in low water, and that it probably wasn't swept out with nets, and probably all mine were. At all events, Dan wasn't able to stir anything in them, no more than I could. But he said the weather was going to break, and he was right enough.

"It was the night before the 27th of August, when it broke with a lot of thunder and rain, and in the morning it was bright again; but the river was still rising, or anyhow not falling. I went out and fished for a bit, waiting for the psychological moment that Forsyth talks about; but Dan said there was more water to come and the fish wouldn't rise, though they were up from the sea, for I saw them moving. By about four o'clock it came on such a downpour as I hardly ever was out in, and the day blackened and grew cold. You never saw anything so forsaken as that valley looked in the drift of water and smother of

grey cloud. I went in, and while I was changing it broke into thunder again—the kind of thunder when you hear the sky torn across with a rip just over your head, and the lightning makes you blink. In that kind of storm human beings are just like animals, they always drift together; and I was a human being, so I went downstairs into the little shop. You know the kind of place—a clay floor between two counters: one counter is the bar, which is slopped over with stale porter; the other is the shop, where they sell damp matches, and envelopes gummed together, and tea and biscuits, and every necessary of life in its least attractive form; and the whole place reeks of porter and paraffin, and bacon, and several other fragrances, and there is a window looking to the street, hermetically closed.

"The entire household was there, of course. Michael Flynn, the big chap who kept the hotel, was behind the bar. He wore a Newgate fringe, not very much bristlier than his eyebrows; his son was rummaging for something in a dark corner, and the two girls were at the counter.

Dan Keary was discoursing to Flynn across the bar with a couple of other worthies, and there was a woman sitting in the only chair, with her hands crossed on a parcel in her lap and her head down. She had evidently come in from the country for shopping and been weather-bound, and at the first look I thought she was in a bad fright. Anyhow, she was perfectly silent, but her lips were moving all the time. The two girls were giggling rather nervously.

"I was feeling rather divided in my mind about this flood, for it seemed as if my luck was to come at the expense of a lot of poor people. I expected to hear talk of nothing but the desperate damage to the oats—which, of course, were being laid as flat as a board. But, to my surprise, the only thing that the men were discussing was the effect upon a sort of pious picnic—the excursion to a station at the Holy Well. 'There was three carloads of them went through here this morning about eight o'clock,' Michael Flynn said, 'and one girl with a bad cough on her this while back.' 'Faith,' said Dan, 'maybe she would have been better in her bed a day like this.' But

Flynn was a very devout man, and he would not hear of this. 'Well, now, I always heard it for a fact that there was never any one yet that went to that Well in a right mind, and did what was set down for to be done, but they were the better of going—saving always,' he said, looking sharp at the woman, who was sitting mumbling to herself, 'that they would ask something not fit to be granted.'

"I made a note, after my habit, to ask Dan for some explanation at a more convenient season. Just then, before any more could be said, we heard feet running down the road, the door was thrown open, and three men stepped in; the rain streaming off them made pools on the floor. The moment they spoke it was plain they belonged to another county, and I said to Dan, 'Who are they?' 'Three Highlanders out of Donegal working on a conthrack,' he told me. The last of them to enter was one of the most powerful human beings I ever looked at—very tall and rather gaunt, with a small head and a jaw like a pike's; high cheekbones, forehead dinted in, and small deep-set eyes. In spite of its rugged-

ness, the face was pleasant though, a queer mixture of good-humour and possible ferocity. They stood there in a group dripping in the doorway, a little shy; and behind them was the strange unnatural darkness of the evening, darker than it would have been most days at eight o'clock.

"'God save us all, Neil,' said Mick Flynn, speaking to the big man, 'what kind of weather is that to be taking the road in? Is it from Mike O'Hanlon's you're coming?'

"'We thought it was quieter out of doors nor in,' the man answered, with a twinkle in his eye. Then he caught sight of the woman sitting there, and turned away from Flynn. 'That's a wild evening, Mrs. O'Hea,' he said.

"Obviously he didn't want to talk; but there was a quick-eyed little fellow with him who was ready enough, and I saw Dan making up to him. 'Was there any quarrel between yez and the O'Hanlons?'

"'There was quarrel enough, then, if Neil M'Nelis was as brave as he's big,' the little man said, spitting viciously on the ground. 'But he's that cautious like, he was afeard of killing Johnny O'Hanlon.

Wasn't that what he told us, William?' he asked, turning to the other Donegal man.

"The big fellow interrupted before he could get an answer. 'Bad luck to my tongue, then, if I told you what was not to be repeated, Ned M'Cormick. And if there was any trouble at all, wasn't it because you were for ever threeping it to Johnny O'Hanlon that I could beat him with a hand tied behind me? An' right well I know the kind of him, that if there was to be a fight, he's not the one that would quet it in a hurry. An' the drink was in him at the time he spoke.'

"'Well, now,' said Michael Flynn in his judicial way, 'take my word for it, Neil, you done right. If it was in Mike O'Hanlon's house you were, and he seen any kind of fight and his brother getting worsted, he'd not stay looking.'

"'An' if you beat the two of them,' Dan Keary put in, 'the O'Hanlons are a terrible strong clan, and they'd keep it up on you as long as you were in this country.'

"'Well,' said the big man, 'if Johnny O'Hanlon was looking help, he needn't go far to look it this day. There was half the

O'Hanlons in the country-side in Mike's house before we quet.'

"'Ay, troth,' said Ned M'Cormick, 'and great diversion with them. There was Mike himself and the wife and four childer: that's six; and there was Johnny O'Hanlon that came in middling cheerful from the station at Killala, and Black Peter Maloney with him, and his wife, that's Michael's sister: that's nine now. An' a couple more of them, cousins, John O'Hanlon and his wife, that came running in out of the rain from off the road. That's eleven.'

"'Ay,' said the other Donegal man, 'and the fiddler with them that was making down here for Teelin, against the fair. An' they had him up in the corner playin' for them to dance, before Johnny began to strip and square up at Neil thonder.'

"'Lord save us! such a houseful,' said Mick Flynn; 'twelve of them, and the three of you.'

"'Faith, there was one more, or the ninth part of one,' said Ned M'Cormick. 'For Michael had the tailor in with him making a new coat agin the fair.' Then he turned to the woman that was sitting there, and he

had a malicious look in his little eyes. I had noticed she had stopped mumbling to herself, and was listening very intently. The little fellow had noticed her too, but he made believe to be just catching sight of her.

"'Och, and is that yourself, Mrs. O'Hea? Troth, then, Michael was talking of you: for he says to the tailor, "God help you if the coat's not everything it ought to be. I'm for the fair at Teelin, and I'm bound to meet my sweetheart, Biddy O'Hea, and I'd like to be lookin' my best."'

"She was an oldish woman, about fifty, I daresay, with a large, plain, round face; and her face itself didn't change much. But the whole of her body shook and bent together as she sat, and her fingers crisped themselves in a spasm of rage; and she spoke, but the words came so fast and broken that I couldn't hear what she was saying; only it was plain enough it wasn't sweet to hear.

"But M'Nelis took the little fellow by the shoulder and swung him round towards the door. 'Bad luck to you for a spiteful wee divil!' said he. 'Sure, Mrs. O'Hea, don't mind his talk.'

"But she got up and she gathered her shawl round herself and her parcel, with hands still shaking violently, and she began to speak, in the sing-song voice like a chant that Irish country people often fall into when they are in a passion.

"'"'Twas on St. Brigid's day I put my curse on Mike O'Hanlon and all that belongs to him and draws breath in his house. May the breath choke in their throats! was the word I said, and I went to St. Brigid's own water to say it. An' to-day there's a station at the Well, and the whole of the O'Hanlons is gathered under one roof, and them dancing and singing. An' my curse is on them an' them dancing and singing.'

"There wasn't one of us that said a word, and for my own part I was what they call in my country 'touched under.' There's a lot of sound physiological observation in that phrase, if you think of it. She went across to the door, and just as she had it open, she turned and said to M'Nelis, 'How many was in the O'Hanlons' house when you left it?' Then the door shut on her, and there was dead silence again,

till one of the girls spoke with a frightened titter—

"'Lord save us! that's an awful woman.'

"'She's a bloody witch,' snapped out little M'Cormick, who had turned a sort of green.

"'Mind you, how quick she was to reckon out the thirteen,' said Mick Flynn reflectively. 'Eleven O'Hanlons and the fiddler and the tailor. An' not one of us here or there noticed it.'

"'Is it them notice it?' Dan struck in; 'sure Michael would not value it a snuff of a candle if he knew. What does he care about the like of that? Just the very same as he cares about Biddy O'Hea and her curses. Hasn't he heard her curse him like that a hundher times? And doesn't he see her stand at the door of her cottage cursing him, and him going out in the morning and coming in at night?'

"'Well and well! Still and all, it's a wild evening, and I'm thinking, M'Nelis, maybe coming out of that was the best thing ever you did. Come now, boys, a glass of whisky to put us in better heart.'

"The thunder by that time was growling

away in the distance, the rain had slackened a bit, and I was mighty curious about all this. What was even more important, I didn't want my gillie to go on the burst. So after one glass I hauled the reluctant Dan out with me to look at the river, knowing that if I got him as far as the bridge I could speed him on to Mrs. Dan with some remnants of my half-crown in his pocket.

"The hotel stands where the main road up and down the valley is met at right angles by another making straight for the bridge, at which my fishing started. It was clearing a bit seawards, and the main rack of cloud came that way from the south-west. But up the valley, in among the hills, it looked wilder than ever; there was simply a black mass of vapour, twisted into queer shapes, apparently with a strong swirl from the east coming up against the general drift. Dan looked up at it.

"'Begor! Biddy O'Hea will get a cooling for her anger before she's gone far. Wouldn't you think the sky was going to fall? 'Twill be down on top of her before she gets to Dohoomiss Bridge.'

"'Is it up there she lives?' I said.

"'You know the long pool you were looking at? Well, just a piece below that.'

"I thought for a moment he meant the cottage I had my eye on, opposite the watcher's hut, and said so.

"'No, sir,' said Dan; 'that's where her enemy lives—O'Hanlon.' Then I began to understand.

"'A big, black, clean-shaven fellow?' I said.

"'That's the very man. You seen him up there? Well, you might notice Biddy's cottage away back a bit in the hill. The way to it would be past O'Hanlon's; but he keeps a wicked dog there, and Biddy has a track now made for herself over the mountain. Och, yes,'—for I asked him the obvious question,—'but what can the craythur do? She's a widdy woman with a weak family of girls, an' she got bad usage from Mick O'Hanlon first and last.'

"I asked him what they fell out about. 'It was about some geese,' said Dan, seeming to think that a final explanation. When I pressed for more details, it seemed that O'Hanlon said that she had stolen his and

sold them, or she said that he had stolen hers—I forget which. Anyhow, Dan thought that the geese had been straying by the road and were just lifted by some of those fellows that go through driving big flocks of them to market. Then his cows got into her corn, and her cows got into his corn, and they accused one another of breaking down fences on purpose, and so it went on. I think maybe Dan was right, and there's no call to look for other reasons why those people should hate one another. In a town nobody has time to have enemies. It's only in the country that hatreds really ripen. You see a person going in and going out every day—he's part of the landscape almost—and every time you see him, hate stirs in your belly. And you see few other people—hardly any one else in a case like this. He fills the whole field of your vision. Then there are always these little incidents of geese, and gaps, and the like of that; and there's worse. His potatoes are growing near your potatoes, and his corn near your corn, and either you rejoice to see his doing worse, or you hate him like hell because his are doing better. That's

the way you get a really fine well-rooted specimen of hate, that gets its nurture daily and grows like a tree. Love and hatred are both of them very much a matter of proximity, and your neighbour is twice as much your neighbour in the country.

"Still, everywhere in Arcadia you have these sort of feuds, and they aren't explosive. They simply blacken a nature slowly, they don't result in act. But in this case there was another feud which might very well have passed over, only that it underlay this hatred begotten of proximity, and was kept warm. There was a history—commonplace enough, but dramatic in the ordinary way. I got it out of Dan by cross-questioning. This fellow Mike O'Hanlon was always what Dan called 'a boyo': he was a poacher and a stiller of whisky, of course, but Dan thought little of that. Only he broke the laws that these people respected as well as the laws they did not; he neglected his duty at confession, and he was pretty miscellaneous in his sweethearting. You know, of course, the peculiarity of Irish Catholics: they don't like sexual irregularity; and the wilder and more outlandish

a place is in Ireland, the fewer illegitimate births there are. It may be temperament, tradition, training — I don't know which. But anyhow the fact is certain. A man who runs loose is counted irreligious and disapproved of, and a woman who makes a slip might nearly as well hang herself at once. Well, in the course of his adventures Mike O'Hanlon came across Biddy O'Hea, who was then Biddy something else, and she was a woman of strong will and a violent temper, and she wanted to marry Mike. But she had no fortune, and anyhow very likely he had no notion of settling down. Perhaps she counted on that. But what she did was to marry a very old man who held this little farm up by the long pool. I couldn't get anything clear about dates; but there were children born, and after some time there was a fierce quarrel between Mike O'Hanlon and his father, and the priest was mixed up in it, and Mike went off to America. The pretext was some trouble about the seizure of a still, when the police were assaulted and one man badly hurt, and it was thought that Mike might be wanted. But Dan seemed to think that the reason why there

was not the usual evidence forthcoming to establish Mike's *alibi* was that Mike's father and the priest wanted him out of the country.

"After a while old O'Hanlon died, and Mike came back to take up the farm, and, according to Dan, his morals were none the better. America is a questionable school, and there was a fellow out of a very lawless parish that I knew, who came back after a couple of years, saying he never seen wickedness right till he seen it in the streets of New York. The contact with civilisation is not always a success for primitive natures. As Dan put it, there was no Christianity left in Mike O'Hanlon. Well, when he came back, Biddy O'Hea's old man was dead, and the priest himself tried to make up a marriage. But, as Dan said, 'Faith, Michael was a good match now, and the wee house down by the pool was on the way to Biddy's, and there was a girl in it with a fortune of a hundher and fifty pound, and Mike carried his courting no farther nor that.' So you may judge if the widow was kindly disposed to her neighbours when Mike settled in there. And I would say

that in the slanging matches the geese and the gaps and the rest of it figured principally as a pretext.

"I don't know when the public quarrelling began or how long it went on; the gatherings when it happened would only come once or twice a year. Only it became recognised that whenever Mike O'Hanlon and Biddy O'Hea met in a fair, there would always be this sort of encounter. And, although O'Hanlon had the best of it for the rest of the year, and could always retort on her, and did, about her dirty little house and the weeds in her corn, and her starved-looking pony and so on, still, as Dan said, 'she had the tongue of him,' and public opinion was on her side. Well, I suppose the man wanted to silence her once and for all, and he didn't care how he did it, for, as I tell you, there was no Christianity in him. At all events the crisis came when they met in Teelin at a market, and Dan was there and went up to listen.

"'She joined on him at once,' he said, 'and maybe she didn't give him a dressing down. An' Mike stood there, with his back turned, letting on not to hear her,

when all the while there was a ring of people round them, the same as there would be round a fight. "An'," says she at last, "I wouldn't put clean pigs to sleep with that dirty ugly lump of a woman you have, and them little red leprechauns of childer." An' at that Mike turned his head an' his shoulder and says, "Well, there's two fine black-haired girls in your own house anyway, and proud I am of them; for it was little your ould crooked O'Hea had to do with the making of them." An' then he turned on her and laughed in her face, wicked-like. "Och, Biddy," says he, "don't be too hard on your old sweetheart." And when she heard that she turned the colour of that stone,' said Dan, striking on the bridge parapet, 'and you would have thought she was going to drop; but faith, not she. She up with her hands like that to the sky, and she prayed God the words might choke in the throat of him. But you heard her cursing him herself, and I needn't be telling you the way of it. And sure it was no wonder she would be mad, for what person at all would put up with a thing like that cast up to them, let it be true or false—

barring one that had no spirit at all in them?'

"'She doesn't want for spirit anyhow, if she faced a storm like this,' I said, looking up the valley. 'They're getting it heavy up there. I suppose now she won't mind seeing her own crops go if his are washed out?'

"The whole head of the valley was lost in a black welter of cloud, as if a curtain was dropped between us and it. Dan took out his pipe and spat hard—

"'She's a desperate woman that. What did she do but make the whole journey in her bare feet to the Holy Well, and she said a station backwards on him: ay, the whole of it, the five Paternosters and the five Hail Marys, and the prayer to Saint Brigid herself; every one of them backwards, beginning at the Amen, and praying that she might get the thing she desired, and that was the death by suffocating of Mike O'Hanlon and all his family.'

"I remember the way Dan mouthed out the long words as if he enjoyed them, and I remember trying to say something in chaff about O'Hanlon's being in no danger of

choking from drought, when Dan interrupted me. We were leaning both of us with our arms on the parapet of the bridge, looking up a long stretch they called the mill-pool, and watching the water automatically as it came tearing down—hardly discoloured at all, for there was no laboured land worth speaking of in the drainage. Suddenly Dan said to me in a puzzled way, 'The water's falling.'

"It sounded impossible; but sure enough at the ford, about fifty yards up, the break of a stone was showing. I looked up the valley: the sky was clearing, and for a minute I thought it had been only a local storm, and the upper water got none of it. But the river was running down now like the sand in an hour-glass—'Be damned to me if ever I see the like of that!' said Dan. Then he gave a shout, 'Oh, merciful Jesus, look there!'

"There was no need for him to point up the stream, I tell you. A great yellow mass came round the corner up above, and broke into the mill-pool. It spread a bit then, but still it came on in a regular wall fully a foot high, and thick and muddy. Dan stood

staring; but I caught hold of him, 'Run, man! the bridge'll go.' It didn't go, though; but I've often thought since that if it had we might as well have been on top of it as watching the flood from the roadway. I'll never forget the roar, ending in a sort of smack, as it came up against the masonry. There was a lot of stuff floating, of course; but only small things, till we saw a brownish mass coming down—it came at an awful pace. 'Here's a hayrick,' I said; but just as it reached the ford, I suppose, a rock met it, and it wallowed right over. There wasn't the least doubt about it—it was half the thatch of a house. Well, I don't think I'm superstitious; but the only difference between Dan and me was that I said nothing and he spoke out. 'As sure as death,' he said, 'it's O'Hanlon's. The whole of them's drownded.'

"We started running back to the village, when a thought struck me. 'Go you and give the alarm,' I said; 'I'm going up to Cudheen to see would there be anything there.'

"Cudheen was the name of a pool just above the mill-pool, and there was a tongue

of gravel sticking out there; it was the sharpest bend on the river. I left Dan and ran across the fields; but when I got to the bank the stream had cut a new course for itself: the spit was gone, and instead of curving in by the left bank, it rushed straight down. Only it had gone down nearly as quick as it had risen, and on the gravel bank at my feet there was a man lying, with only his legs in the water. It was O'Hanlon right enough.

"I dragged him high and dry. There was no use trying to do anything. In a minute Dan and three or four other fellows were up with me. 'Lord save us!' was pretty much all they said. Then Dan spotted a thing I hadn't noticed. The coat was on the man, but twisted round the body, only one arm in the sleeve. And it was a half-made coat, just roughly stitched together.

"'Do you mind that?' Dan said. 'He was just trying it on when the flood took him. Boys, but it must have been suddent.'

"The more I thought of it, the less I could understand what had happened. I told them to take the body up to the

roadside and into the village, and I started up the valley to see what had happened, on the off-chance of giving help. But I had no more doubt in my mind that Biddy O'Hea's curse had been fulfilled to the letter than any of the rest of them.

"I suppose it was about two miles up the road to the bridge, and we ran, or half ran, every step of the way. The rain was over, and it was clearer, if anything, than it had been; but still everything was that kind of blackish grey. About a mile up we took a short cut across a corner of hill, and as we got to the top of it, I saw a woman along the road on our left. In a little, when she noticed us running, she began to run too. It was Biddy O'Hea. By the time we had got a little farther a car passed us, lashing and galloping, with the priest and the doctor in it, and there was a stream of people all along the road behind us; but I could see the old woman coming along at a kind of shuffling trot in front of them. It was wonderful how she kept up.

"In another couple of minutes we turned the corner—Dan and I had caught hold of the back of the car, and were running with

it—and then we saw what had happened. Biddy O'Hea's cottage was in sight plain enough; O'Hanlon's would be hidden by the ground in any case; but there was a long brown scar down the hillside just above it. Dan shouted in my ear—we were all too excited to speak quietly—'The big rock's down on them.' And sure enough the boulder I had noticed sticking out was gone at last, as I suppose all the other boulders had gone century by century, down into the lowest level that the river course had scoured out.

"We crossed the bridge, still hanging to the car, and over the bank into the mountain, before the priest could get down; but the doctor, who was an active young chap, simply took a flying leap at the bank and was with us. The driver left the horse where he was, and ran too. But over the rough ground I couldn't keep up with Dan and the doctor, as they scrambled like goats among the heather, taking the angler's track along the river.

"There was a tearing great flood, of course, but nothing to account for washing out a house twenty feet up, till we got to

the long pool. The water was back between the banks—it would generally be six or seven feet below them—but you could see it had been out till the gorge was filled like a bath. I could see nothing of O'Hanlon's house till I got right to the top of the last rise in the path, and there were Dan and the doctor looking down at it. The farther wall was standing and a bit of the near one, but the whole was heaped with clay and stuff. And right through the three gables of shed and cottage there was a monstrous savage gap, where the stone had bowled through as clean as a ball through a wicket. And there was the stone itself, fair in the throat of the stream at the very narrowest point. The water tore through in a sluice at each side of it, cutting in on the bank like a knife; while I was looking, a great piece of the far side fell with a plop.

"It was plain enough what had happened. A big rain-burst had detached the rock from its holding in the face of the hill; it had rolled down—and probably between the lash of the rain and the roar of the river at their doors the people in

the house never even heard the sound of it. It had struck the wall and swept all before it; then lodging in the river-bed dammed up that terrible flood, and in a few seconds the whole place was a-wash. The little sort of lawn that the house stood in had been six or eight feet deep in water. Then the clay of the banks gave, and the river cut through, sucking out whatever floated, and tearing it along down to the sea. The whole place was as bare as your hand, only that about the walls of the house the loose earth that had been brought down with the falling stone was licked into smooth heaps. And when we came nearer we saw a man's boot sticking up through it.

"We fell to, tearing with our hands. But the clay was washed hard together. 'Where'll we get spades?' I said. 'Go up, Dan, to Biddy O'Hea's, and bring one down,' said the priest. But you should have seen his face when he said it. Dan pretended not to hear him. Then the priest roared at him. 'Ah, sure, what use?' Dan said sulkily. I caught hold of him, saying, 'Come on, Dan.' He

went then; but there was no getting him to hurry. I ran on by myself. When I got to the house the door was shut and locked. I knocked first, then I kicked. There was the woman sitting by the fire; she never lifted her head. Two frightened-looking girls had let me in. I said, 'Give me all the spades you have.' They brought me a spade and a slane for turf-cutting, and I ran back. Dan was outside. 'Was she in there?' he asked, with a face of terror. 'Yes,' I said — I was in no humour for talking — 'go on with these,' and I gave him the spades. He ran like a hare now, and I came on slower. By the time I got down there was a crowd about the place. When the clay was all turned over, they had got three bodies out, and a cat and two dogs and a pig. All O'Hanlon's live stock were out that evening, but nothing escaped that was under the roof. One man and a child were crushed right into the ground by the boulder. The man was Johnny O'Hanlon; and I saw big Neil M'Nelis, that he had wanted to fight, sobbing and crying over him, 'Och, Johnny O'Hanlon,

is that where you are now? You that was standing up to me that bold this day, and me as big again as you. It was the foul blow you met, Johnny.' But little M'Cormick, the sharp-faced, red-headed little fellow, stood up there in the middle, and his eyes were as red as fire. 'Boys,' he said, 'the rest of them's gone down the river. Where's the bloody witch that done this, till we send her after them?'

"It's a horrible thing to say; but when I thought of that old woman sitting crouched there by the fire, as if she was gloating over the defeat of her enemies, the man's words seemed natural. There wasn't much time to think, though. The priest was standing there, a big, red-faced, coarse-looking man as you could see. He took a step over, and he caught M'Cormick by the throat, and shook him like a rat. 'Would you dare!' he said, 'ye bad Christian! Would you dare, then!' Then he threw the man from him, and he faced round, gathering the whole crowd in front of him with a sweep of his arm. Then he made the sign of the cross in air, and raised one hand.

"'Go down on your knees, every one of you, and pray for the souls of them that God has cut off without warning in their sins.'

"It was the strangest thing I ever saw, the change in him from a red-faced bully into the shepherd of his people. The fashion of his countenance changed, as the Bible says. And he prayed there standing over the dead bodies, while the men knelt round him in the twilight—rolling out the Latin words, that neither I nor they understood, in his great Connaught brogue. Then he stopped and spoke to them again. 'Now you will say one more Paternoster for the help of a soul that is maybe in worse danger nor theirs, and in saying it you will pray humbly to Almighty God that He may not bring down upon your heads the fulfilment of your own evil desires. And you will leave to the judgment of God the one that invoked God's judgment.'

"He began again in the broad Latin, kneeling himself, and they said the prayer after him, sentence by sentence, kneeling there on the wet sod. Then he stood up and shook himself. 'Away with you down

the river, boys, and search every eddy and back-water, and get nets and dredge the holes. There's ten bodies needing Christian burial, and that's the last good turn ever you'll do them.'

"They broke up in a minute. The priest watched them scatter, some going back to the bridge, some following down the bank. Then he turned up the hill to the woman's house. I know no more about it; but I couldn't understand the confidence with which he faced that job when he started up across the heather at a slow pace, with his eyes fixed on the ground, and reciting prayers to himself, for I could see his lips moving. I have often speculated since on the scene there must have been. However, as I said, I know nothing of what happened; except that Biddy O'Hea was always a pattern Christian from that day, and the neighbourhood regarded her with fear certainly, but with a kind of veneration. They were vastly civil to her, I need not tell you—and, what is more, to judge by what I heard since, they are rather proud of her as a local celebrity.

"The bodies were all recovered—most of them in the tideway. But we worked at the river all that night. I couldn't help being grimly amused at the number of nets that were forthcoming in half an hour and the general handiness in working them, and the promptitude and skill that was displayed in getting out torches. I suppose there wasn't a man or boy but had burned the water times and again. I tell you a queer thing, though. There were over fifty salmon taken out that night as they were working the nets—for there had been a tremendous run of fish—but every one of them was put back.

"Oh no, it was no use to me; some other chaps did mighty well on the river before that flood had run down—one man got ten in a morning just above Dohoomiss. But I never threw a line. I didn't care to benefit by St. Brigid's dispensations."

IV

WITH THE PILCHARD FLEET

Looe, during half the year, lives by pilchard, thrives by pilchard, speaks of pilchard, reeks of pilchard, thinks of pilchard, stinks of pilchard. In the forenoon the quays are very quiet: perhaps a few men at work on a small collier schooner that lies unloading; down at the ferry a group of watermen with their boats on the watch for seaside visitors who want a trip on the water, or a couple of hours' pollock-fishing. But the fishermen proper, who are the life and soul of Looe, keep the same hours as Fleet Street—or maybe a trifle later. Early in the afternoon a stir begins; hardy-looking bearded fellows, boys with young faces already weatherbeaten, come and go on the quays with the slow walk of sea-faring people; you see them drop quietly and without fuss into the small

gigs heaped high with empty baskets, and slip gently down the river out to where the boats lie moored in a ring, two hundred yards, three hundred yards, off the pier-head. Unless, indeed, the night before has been a busy one; then the boats will be alongside the pier, and instead of row-boats you shall see, towards four or five in the afternoon, lugger after lugger slowly hoist its brown heavy sail and make down the narrow tideway, dropping easily with the ebb, or towed against the tide by a heavy rope from the pier in the same leisurely way. But in the night it is a very different story. However sound the sleep that sleepy Cornish air brings you, it is odds but one night you are wakened in the small hours by cries and bustling noises. Then if you go sleepily to your window, you see in the bright moonlight the whole quay on both sides lined with the luggers, and men in each of them busily stripping the shining pilchards out of the dark nets. They have "shot" a second time, and sooner than lose the tide, have hauled nets, fish and all, straight aboard, and run for home.

Only one set of creatures at Looe are

busy for ever — the gulls. Morning and evening they are circling, soaring, plunging, or swimming over the narrow channel that divides East and West Looe; and whenever either Looe looks across from its windows at its rival over the water, there is always a white breast, grey wings, or a dove-coloured back seen in the foreground of the picture. For the fishermen, as they strip the nets, toss overboard the broken fish, and the bed of the river, as you see it in clear water, is dotted white with these leavings. Down there the dead fish wait till the crabs or eels have their will of them, but whatever drifts is the prey of the gulls; and there is always something adrift to keep the white and grey pack wheeling, screaming, chasing, and calling, and adding the last touch of the picturesque to the huddle of grey houses.

To the fisherman's instinct nothing fishy is alien, and I was naturally curious about pilchard. In Looe, as I have hinted, pilchard is in evidence: you see him everywhere, and you smell him—a strong oily smell—before you see him. Beyond these facts, I had ascertained that practically the

whole take goes away to the Mediterranean —the bulk of it shipped to Genoa—and I had learnt from one of the greatest fish buyers on the coast that the pilchard is nothing more than a big sardine, and a sardine only a small pilchard. It was a proposition, however, that the Cornish fishermen could not bring themselves to accept: they were confident that in any possible mixture of pilchards and sardines they could pick out the pilchards. I had pushed my investigations as far as the curing-shed, where there is a big structure of concreted tanks—ten in all—each tank able to hold many thousands of pilchards. The process is simplicity itself. When a new tank is started the fish are pitched into the bottom, without any formality of cleaning, and a certain proportion of salt is thrown on them; next day more pilchards and more salt; and so on, the liquid which exudes from the fish making their own pickle, till at last the tank is brimming. There the fish are left until sufficient time has elapsed to pickle the latest lot; as for the under layers they are, *a fortiori*, sufficiently pickled. And the beauty of the process is that with

it fish cannot spoil. You may leave them a year, or even two years, and they will not be over-cured; and therefore you need only barrel them as the demand comes in. Then you pack them in circular rows till the barrel is full, and put it under a screw-press, which brings the fish down perhaps a third of the way; then fill up again and press again, and so on till your barrel is packed tight and contains the regulation weight. And in the meanwhile the oil exuding from the staves is running into a tank and will fetch £3 a barrel in Bristol, where the finest of it makes castor-oil, and the dregs go into soap.

The shed in question was owned by an Italian firm, who have another establishment at Polperro, and the process represents an improvement on the old method of curing the fish on boards. The difference simply lies in this, that the fish in the vats can wait on the market; the fish cured in "baulks" must be sold or lost by a given time. Why did not the fishermen build vats of their own? I asked. None had the capital. Why did they not combine? There had been talk of that, but nothing came of it.

As it stands, therefore, the great bulk of the fish that comes in is sold to a single firm, who have a practical monopoly and can make the price; for those who still cure their own fish are few, and even they, as has been shown, work at a heavy disadvantage. Here in Looe, as everywhere, the English are paying dear for their unwillingness to accept the principle of industrial co-operation.

Curing-sheds, however interesting to the amateur, are smelly places, and decidedly the real thing to see was the fishing itself. So I applied to the old boatman with whom I went "whiffing" for pollock and mackerel, and he presented me to the skipper of the boat in which he had worked for a matter of twenty years after his time in the navy. Your sergeant when he retires from the army does not find any great stock of active occupations; but your petty officer, with his pension of from sixteen shillings to a pound a week, can make a very pretty living when he settles down in a fishing port and draws another pay direct from the blue water.

Tide was dead low that day a little after

noon, and the *Matilda* had been got down in the morning and was moored outside. The skipper arranged to pick me up at the ferry at four, and I retired to make provision. My landlady—a sailor's wife herself—said that Cornish pasties were the only fare for sea-going, and I (in my ignorance) laid in a flaskful of whisky.

At four, accordingly, the crew of three crossed over for me—the skipper, a man well up in years, who had followed his trade from boyhood; a pensioner of the naval reserve; and a good-looking young chap of seven-and-twenty, fair-haired and bearded, but showing that Jewish or Oriental type which is so common in Cornwall that one is constantly reminded there of the Phœnician strain, as of the Spanish on the coast of Connemara.

By five the jib and mizzen were set, the big lug hauled a-peak, and we were standing under a light northerly air eastward past Downderry towards Ram Head; and thirty or forty other brown-sailed boats were heading the same way.

It was a Monday, and Cornwall is a devout county; so neither Saturday nor

Sunday night had the fleet been out, and they had therefore, more or less, lost touch of the pilchards. When we had run five or six miles down into the bay the leading boats were to be seen heading round, and our crew, who had all the time been debating chances together, now joined in a discussion, shouted from boat to boat, "Seen any sign?" One boat, it seemed, had seen a pilchard jump away in-shore to the west of us; but that was rather shoal water for a ten-ton lugger like ours. And so we cruised round and round, watching the other boats, watching the water for any sign, watching for the plunge of a gannet or even a gathering of the gulls, and watching the sun also for the time of shooting.

The theory of the thing is, that fish are most likely to go into a net just at the change of light; and accordingly you shoot just before sundown and haul with the first of the dark. If the moon is up, as she had been the week past, before sunset, that is bad; and as it was, her rising before the daylight was fully out of the sky did us no good.

Still, even under poorer conditions, the same boat had taken seventeen thousand fish

the week before, and thirty thousand the week before that; and in the meantime, good or bad for fishing, it was about as lovely an evening as ever came out of the sky.

Grey and a little misty when we came out, it cleared overhead and on the horizon, as the breeze freshened. At first only the long slope of the cliffy hills towards Polperro could be seen; Polperro itself, in the haze of veiled sunlight, looked far distant. But half an hour before setting the sun blazed out in a wind-swept sky, and the long low line of the land running out past Mevagissey and Gorran Haven to the Deadman point—behind which lies Falmouth—was plain to see. It was just then we "shot," about a mile from the Downderry cliff, heading due south. The nets are stowed amidships in the space filled by the cabin in a small yacht; a cover of boarding lies over them. The first buoy was flung overboard, and there was a little discussion: should the net ride at the full depth—sixteen feet below the buoy? It was decided to shorten, as the water was shallowish, and as each buoy was tossed out a loop was tied

on the connecting line. Each net is 120 yards long, and it rides from a line of buoys, sinking by its own weight. The buoys are fast to the head-rope, on which are set small corks, not large enough to float it, yet enough to make it lighter than the net itself, which hangs free below it. Before you shoot, every stitch of sail is taken off the boat—and in heavy weather the masts too are lowered, and baskets towed over the side to check the way—and then, over goes the first buoy out to starboard on the windward side, and float by float the long string, over half a mile of it, is slowly paid out.

All about us were boats dropping their peaks and starting for the slow drift; and behind them the sun was just going down into a bank of cloud, while the low line of green hills under him seemed one translucent mass of glorious golden olive, beyond the dazzle of the water. Then he plunged into the cloud bank, and the barred heap of vapour glowed as if molten; and over in the east beyond Ram Head the grey clouds caught a rosy flush. But the golden bank of hill grew solid and dark again, and more and more dark and solid, as the last of the

sun's disc, clear for a moment above the hill-crest, sank out of sight. And the net was still paying out slowly, slowly, till it came to the last knot, and the young sailor spat on it—"There! good luck go with you," he said, as the drift-rope went overboard after it, given a clear thirty yards so that the net might fish out to the last corner.

There was nothing to do now but drift wherever the tide and breeze might choose to take us—nothing but to put a lamp amidships for a signal that we were a fishing-boat and unmanageable. A trawler out of Plymouth came up through the fleet, and excited the indignation of our crew, for instead of a side-light she carried one at the mast-head, which should signify that she also had her net shot and was out of control. She was going to shoot in-shore of us, along the sand, and the sight of her started one of those disquisitions on the whole race of trawlers that begin whenever fishermen are together. Here, as everywhere else, anathemas are heaped on the steam-trawler; hake and gurnet, fish that used to be had in thousands on this coast, are now hardly fished for, and all because the whole ground has

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been scratched and torn up and the spawn destroyed. So at least the naval reserve man stated it while we were rigging a couple of lines to fish for pollock.

This was a discouraging business at the outset, for the little chad (as they call the small sea-bream here) nibbled off bait after bait with impunity, until one, larger or rasher than the rest, took the hook in his mouth, and his tougher flesh made a more useful bait than the half-pickled pilchard. Presently a pollock came, but a small one, not two pounds' weight; and then the skipper took one line and I the other. One would say the hand-line fishing should put every one on a level, but the fact is that he hauled in nine or ten of the beautiful olive-brown fish, running about three pounds' weight, while I got barely one. If pollock were only as good as they looked,—or if they were cooked as an Italian of the Riviera would cook them,—what an excellent thing a pollock would be!

The moon was well up by now, making a silver shine over the sea, and all about us the lights were bobbing and twinkling on the grey water; and the skipper, even while he hauled in the pollock, had his mind on

pilchard. We were hardly shot before there was sign, and no mistaking it. Suddenly from astern of us—but away on our lee, alas!—there arose a screaming of gulls. There they were, thick as bees, rising and settling, screaming and fighting, while at the noise grey wings came silently and swiftly flitting low over the water to join in the bickering and the spoil. The next net east of ours had struck a school; if the fish had been in number sufficient to carry the net down they would have headed for the bottom; but when the net is too strong for them to move it, they put their noses up, and the whole thing comes to the surface, while the greedy gulls peck and tear among the strugglers. As we watched, the water took a different colour, whitened and smoothed round the mass. That was the oil coming out of the pilchards, they told me. The cry subsided a little, then broke out in a new place farther east again—some one else had "knocked up." But round our net it was quiet enough. Still the fish were in the bay; that was proved, and by more senses than one. "I hear pilchard," said the skipper, as he swung his bait overboard. At first I

could distinguish nothing, but gradually one's ear detected now and then, first on this side then on the other, the dabbling noise as a shoal rushed through the water on the top. But it would need a trained ear to swear to it, even on a night when the breeze was so light.

We left the lines to fish by themselves for a while and stepped forward into the cuddy for a cup of tea. The skipper praised my landlady's pasties, not without reason ; they were something in the nature of beef-steak pie done up like a jam tart. About the whisky I said nothing, for I remembered that my boatman had looked a little hurt when I suggested beer to him, and had explained that he was a "staunch Rechabite." He did not smoke either, so he told me quite simply, "since he had found the Lord" ; but he was quite prepared to admit that there were "good people that smoked," though in his own case he felt that it "made for condemnation." So I ventured to ask the skipper if he smoked. He had never touched tobacco nor any kind of spirits in his life. And the young man was the same. Very pleasant they were about it,

too, quite free from any touch of bigotry; and certainly they might be taken round the country as patterns of what total abstinence may produce. The navy reserve man smoked, and I hinted to the skipper that perhaps he would not be averse to a glass of whisky. But the skipper said no—without consulting the pensioner, however—and I felt that my experience of boatmen was being entirely revolutionised.

Indeed, if it be not an impertinence to say so, these Cornish sea-going folk fill one with respect. Pleasant company as possible these three were to me—except, indeed, that they were inclined to treat a landsman as if he were a baby in long clothes who could scarcely be trusted to get into or out of a boat on his own feet; and, rough-looking people as they were, living the roughest of lives, there was not a rough word on their tongues. The navy reserve man made one little slip in speech—I regret to say that it was provoked by a mention of Mr. Leonard Courtney, who in those early days of the Boer war still represented that division of Cornwall in Parliament—and he was promptly called to order, and

reduced to the nicest amenities of political discussion.

The nets would have been shot for an hour and a half when we began hauling. In this light weather three men manage the job readily enough, but in the fall of the year they carry a fourth hand, and they must want him. And, even of a fine night, put an average strong man—say a 'Varsity oar—to take his share of the hauling, and I think he would have enough of the unfamiliar strain. Once the drift-rope is in, one man stands by the tiller and hauls on the float-rope—this is the heavy work ; the others fetch the net in over the side, shake out the fish, and get the floats and the folds of net into their place, so that the whole may run out again like line off a reel.

As bad luck would have it, the net was only too light in fetching in. Plenty of it came aboard before we met a pilchard, and then it was only a stray fish ; after that they dribbled in, single fish sticking in the bottom of the net. Only just here and there did I see a panel of the net which gave me an idea of what a big catch might be ; for here the fish were stuck all over it in white bunches,

and as the net lifted this white gleam showed through the silvery bubbles, whiter than they. But what astounded me was the length of the business. I took a spell at hauling when, as I supposed, we were about half-way through, and hauled single-handed for perhaps ten minutes, expecting every minute to find myself at the end—at any rate resolute to go on till I got there. But it was not till long after that that I heard we were through four of the eight nets, and even after a second spell of hauling along with the reserve man —it is light work for two—I doubt if I brought in more than two nets all told. It is a very different job from the short heavy lift on a trawl, ending with a desperate heave at the end when you land the bag of the net aboard and see all your take in a lump, tangled up with a mass of stone and seaweed. With the drift-nets it is a slow, steady labour, hauling, hauling, for an hour at the least, and probably, when the nets are full, two hours or even more. For no matter how quickly you handle them, it takes a second or so to wrench out the pilchard that is hanging by his gills without tearing him and to pitch him into the big basket or

maund of plaited cane that stands beside you and fills slowly or rapidly as the case may be. There are stoppages, too, when the net has "rolled"—but a net well shot, as ours was, scarcely has a twist in it—and sometimes from other causes. "'Vast hauling, conger drill," I heard; and they explained to me how the extraordinary circular twist in the body of the net was made by a small conger that had attacked the caught pilchard and "drilled" up and up, trying to get it away, winding the meshes into what to you or me would have been a hopeless tangle, but, in their skilled hands, ravelled out in a moment.

If it was poor fishing, the consolation was that others were no better off. Light after light went out as the boats got under way —sure sign that there was little in their nets —and when our last float came in there were few vessels left on the ground. Only the couple of boats that had "knocked up" were still busy away to the east of us, and as we hoisted the lug and ran home we crossed a trail of buoys that showed another net not half in yet, and therefore presumably full.

Two maunds—a miserable five hundred and a quarter—was all the shot brought us, and with the high bright moon there was no use to try another. In the dark, however, this is done by "bryming." All lights aboard are put out, and a man stands on the bows and stamps heavily every moment or two. The shock on the water scares the pilchards, if they are there; and even through the night the flash of their silver bellies shows as they turn and scud.

It was pleasant on the water, but pleasant also to be getting in. The breeze that had held steady all evening died, after the manner of breezes, and left us half a mile out, with a strong ebb running down the river. All the boats were brought up in a huddle together, exchanging chaff and questions, and putting out sweeps to get to their moorings. It was close on midnight—and the skipper told me the time to within a quarter of an hour by the position of the pointers and the pole-star—before we got in. I was landed on the west of the water on some rocks, but at the full ebb of spring tides the boat could not reach the pier steps in East Looe, and the youngest of the crew had put

his high boots on to give a back to the other two through twenty yards of water. I stayed to watch the result, for the skipper was a solid lift, but when I got to my coign of vantage above the river-mouth, persons could not be distinguished. All I saw was a pack of boats and dark figures moving in the pale moonlight, and all I heard was a babel of cheerful voices. It is an easy trade under those conditions of weather, but a chancy one. Our night's take was not worth five shillings. But with luck it might easily have been ten thousand fish—which really means more than twelve; for you count by the "long hundred" of six score, and give a "lass" in on the lot of ten thousand. And pilchards are worth at present 8s. a thousand on the quay. Divide that into six shares, set three to the share of the boat, and give each man one-sixth for himself. It came in good weeks to £2, in fair ones to 25s.; but a man working at it week in and week out does not average £1 a week, they say—the wage of a farm labourer or little better, and earned at a far more dangerous trade. But a trade of infinite variety and excitement, one would think, with the touch of gambling always

present, beyond the death hazard; and I would sooner earn a pound a week as a fisherman than three times that money groping and sweating in a mine.

V

MY FRIEND THE SALMON POACHER

RESPONSIBILITY is one of those feelings which vary inversely as the distance. When a friend of my friends decided, more or less on my recommendation, to take a river in Connaught, I felt little personal concern; when I heard that the best cook in County Mayo was coming to him for a pound a month, I only laughed. But when events so fell out that I was to be for the first week of his tenancy his guest, and his only guest; that I was to accompany him to this region full of unknown quantities, including an Irish lodge and an Irish cook; then, I must say, responsibility sat very close to my heart. An unknown salmon river is always admittedly a toss-up; but in such matters as comfort and cleanliness the unknown still presents awful possibilities in the West of

Ireland. And the place to which we were going lay in the very most out-of-the-way and unknown of all regions between the Bloody Foreland and Bantry Bay. I shall call the place Barmouth; and our letters from there were dated "Barmouth at the Back of Beyond." Its real name was, like Barmouth, one devoid to the stranger of any alarming associations; but that it carried such associations to those who knew it, we had early warning.

My friend and I met at Broadstone, the terminus of the Midland and Great Western Railway, and immediately plunged deep in discussion of water, flies, and so forth. Our talk was interrupted by a quiet gentleman in the corner of the carriage, also equipped for fishing. "Excuse me," he said, "but I heard you say you were going to Barmouth. Do you quite realise what you are in for?" Then followed lurid details as to the hotel. We explained that we were going to a lodge, but the explanation obviously did not reassure him. My friend and I concealed our apprehensions from each other, and the journey passed pleasantly enough, till we reached our

station on the shore of Clew Bay, sent on our traps by car for the twenty-mile drive, and proceeded to the hotel to lunch before following on bicycles. There I was greeted by acquaintances among a party seated by the window, and I mentioned my destination, which was unknown to them as to me. But just as we were preparing to start in the good spirits which an excellent lunch had generated, another blow descended. An elderly gentleman from the party in the window came up to me, and, naming my name, explained that he knew my father, that he heard we were going to Barmouth, and that he wished to warn me. "Lock your doors at night," he said, "or they will put in drunk drovers to sleep along with you. You'll be lucky if they don't stable donkeys there as well." I gave up the hotel and mentioned the lodge. "Lodge!" he said. "Well, there *may* be a lodge." (It was plain he disputed its existence.) "But anyhow Barmouth is the most God-forsaken spot in Ireland, and if you'll be advised by me, you'll take the next train back to Dublin."

Here were encouraging omens to greet my friend at his first coming to Ireland;

and still worse for me, who felt by this time responsible with a vengeance. We crept out dejectedly; and the infernal nature of things manifested itself more and more. At the first turning, before we had ridden fifty yards, a strolling pig of large size charged and nearly upset us both. What was the use of telling a stranger that such a thing had never happened to me before? He plainly foresaw twenty animated miles of pig-dodging. For a little way we went along by the sea, and cried out for pleasure at the familiar sights and sounds and smells of a land between the heather and the tide; for my friend (thank heaven!), though new to Ireland, was not English. But the grey clouds fell lower, and the long straight road over moorland grew longer, and the wind blew continually and with increasing power in our faces. There was a momentary excitement when we crossed a small river plainly in fishing order, but that soon subsided, and at the end of ten miles we were dead beat.

At the half-way house dwelt, so we were told, the clerk to the Conservators, and as we were going to him for a salmon

license, we decided also to try for a car. A very clean, prosperous-looking half-way house it was, public-house, post-office, shop, and so forth, all in one. Outside the door was a regular stud of bicycles, and with them two or three young men who proved to be dispensary doctors, one from Barmouth. I shall never forget that interview. We were tired certainly, but the rivers were in fair flood, and we still hoped to be in time to kill a fish before dinner. The doctors, representing local information, were unanimous that we might as well fish in a field. The conversation ended by a sporting offer to lay a bottle of champagne that we would not kill two fish in the month. Also, we learnt for the first time that our lodge had stood empty for six years. They were hospitable, friendly people, but they were depressing beyond all words; and we started in the lowest spirits for that drive of ten miles over the bleakest moor I have ever seen, cuddling bony bicycles on our knees.

It was falling dark before we sighted Barmouth, and I was feeling like a criminal as we drove over a bridge and looked ruefully at the discredited river; thence past the

little white-washed town, through a rickety iron gate, up a grassy cart-track, and we reached the lodge. There, at last, our good angel met us. A good Irish servant is the best going, and I have met none better than Francis. He showed us in cheerfully, and there was a grateful smell of peat fires counteracting a flavour of stuffy damp. The walls had been daubed with blue at some time, and over it the damp had made frescoes. A few rags of carpet covered the floor, and in one sitting-room were stacked or thrown together some broken-down leather-covered chairs with the entrails protruding. The final touch of discomfort was added by the scraps of what once were blinds, fluttering, ragged and foul, from the rollers.

I never saw a man behave more like an angel than the tenant of this demesne. He might have sworn; he might have cursed the country; he might, with still more justice, have execrated me. But he did none of these things. Only his patience gave out when our last hope of fishing failed. The correspondence had led him to believe that he was taking the first two miles of river, including the tideway, and

here, we agreed, if all else failed, we should catch white trout. Francis explained to him that his water ran for three miles *above* the bridge. Lucky it was so, as we found, the lower stretch being useless, but it was a blow for the moment. Tough stringy mutton completed our discomfiture; the boxes of provisions and whisky consigned beforehand had not arrived; and we went to bed decidedly resigned. So far as I could see, all the traits of the "typical" Irish character, country, and economy were rising up and hitting us in the eye, to the special damage of an amiable stranger who had more or less taken my word for their non-existence.

Next morning hope came with the eggs and tea, and we went out to explore the river accompanied by Francis, whose account of it was as gloomy as the doctors'. I took a trout rod, giving salmon up as a bad job. Just above the bridge was a long wide stretch of shallowish water, nicely curled by a west wind, and we decided to begin here, as it was obviously a chance for white trout. I waded in while my friend was putting up his rod, and in a couple of casts struck into what seemed to me a very good class of

trout. Three minutes later we saw it was a grilse. Here was a commentary on local information! I wish I could draw a veil over what followed. The fish ran a little, splashed a little, then settled down and showed signs of giving in; when, as I was simply holding him with a light strain, the line came back to me. To my amazement the whole cast was gone, and for an awful moment I thought my knot had been a duffer. It was bad enough, but not so bad. I had put up a last year's cast somewhat used, and the unsoaked gut had cracked at the first loop. I commend the moral to all anglers.

Bad as this was, it was encouraging, and I killed a couple of white trout before I left the pool. We worked up the river, seeing beautiful water but no fish till we reached a deep round hole far up, with a boat on it. Here I gathered in another trout weighing a pound or so, and then there came a shout from my friend, who was fishing the neck of the pool with salmon tackle. He was into a fish, and in a little while had him landed—a nice grilse of some six pounds. I never saw any one more radiant than Francis; and I never saw

Irish people more surprised than the folk of Barmouth when we returned with a salmon and tales of another lost. It was evident to us at once that the people of this village were curiously indifferent to fish and fishing, and simply did not know what was in the river.

We modified this opinion in a week. It was on a Friday that we began, and on the following Wednesday we had killed nothing more in spite of constant endeavour under conditions that were on the whole decidedly favourable. I was competent, the other man exceptionally good, and yet, except in the boat pool, we never stirred a fish or saw sight or sign of a salmon. And in the boat pool, as Francis ingenuously remarked, it was impossible to work a net, owing to rocks at the bottom. We had by this time abandoned the theory that the denizens of the village were indifferent to the denizens of the river. A well-trodden path by all the good throws settled that point.

It is only fair to say that the year was exceptional. There had been no flood in June or July to let fish up. And the estuary of the Breugach river was worked

with nets, not by one company, who might perhaps show some regard for the layers of golden eggs, but by three, fishing in mad competition and paying rents so high that on a rough computation I estimated they must take 5000 salmon yearly to earn a profit. That is too heavy a drain on a small river with a course of twenty miles. Moreover, they were allowed to net far above the tideway, and if the law allows such things, the law is what Mr. Bumble said it was. But, so far as we were concerned, if ever so many fish had got up in May, mighty few would have been left in that water by August. I told an important personage named Dan that I had been surprised to hook a fish in the lower pool under the village. "Troth, then," he answered grimly, "there was more surprised nor you; and if it had been known he was there, he wouldn't have been long in it."

But for the said Dan, I doubt if we should have stuck to it. We made his acquaintance on the second evening after our arrival. I recognised the type at once; only, I had expected him to be a sweep. The local poacher and fly-tier in Ireland

generally unites these functions to that of chimney-cleaning. Probably in Barmouth no chimneys are ever swept. They take fire, or a gun is discharged up them. This, however, is by the way. Dan met me with offers to tie flies and explanations that he had none to show because he had "tried England this year." "An' I never sunk that low afore, sir; I did not, then." In short, it was his first experience of migratory labour, and I arrived that evening at the fact that six weeks of it had brought him back with £3 : 15s. in his pocket. Later on, when we had become more intimate, he produced from his pocket a much-crumpled process for ejectment showing a debt of eight pounds odd, which accounted for his eagerness to serve us. He got an order for a dozen flies from my host, and returned with them in a day or two swearing that they would kill a salmon if there was one in the Breugach water.

As we were by this time convinced that no such beast existed, the announcement left us cold, but it was a different story when he talked of another river—a little stream far up in the hills which belonged to no one in

particular, and was full of white trout. On the right day you could fill a basket, and the right day was a tearing flood. And sure enough next day it rained steadily: not enough to move our own fishless water materially, but certainly enough to flood a mountain stream; and Dan, faithful to his word, came to convoy us. There was some hesitation at the start by reason of a vague report that the stream had just been rented by a gentleman who was taking up all the fishings and shootings in the barony with a view to sublet, but we decided to give ourselves full benefit of the doubt. As it turned out, we were in fact poaching, and had to make apologies which were met with a full permission to fish the place as often as we liked. It was a good end to a bad beginning, like our day on the little river. For we started in a misty drizzle, clouds low on all the hills, and after driving three long miles of road we got out and walked for three-quarters of an hour, hard going, over greasy hummocky bog and heather. Somewhere in the middle of that walk we asked for the meaning of the river's very difficult name. The name, Dan

said, for Dan was an Irish speaker, came from a word that may be spelt phonetically "tharsh," and "tuirseach" means "laborious." Well, the river Laborious was excellently named, for I never knew a stream so hard to come at. As we floundered down the hill-side jumping from tussock to tussock, we inquired about quagmires. There were none here, it seemed, but on the other side there were bogs in which a hound would go after a hare and "not a thing you would see but a misht of water." On this side it was dry enough, and there was great grouse-shooting, and there had been deer too, but not in living memory. The last that was ever seen had a story attached to it, for on a Christmas night there was deep snow on the ground, and a lot of boys, said Dan, was in a house playing cards, and they were up to every kind of divilment.

"And one of them—he must have been drinking heavy—offered for to bet that he would go up to the old church and bring down a skull that was in it. And away he went, and for fear of what he might meet he took the gun with him. And when he got up to the old ruin and lit a light to see would

he find the skull, what did he hear but something moving in the darkness. And he up with the gun and fired, and whatever was in it let a kind of screech, and maybe he didn't run! And when he came back to them he told them it was the old boy was there; 'but,' says he, 'I put him out of that with the shot.' And they were all of them feared to go up that night, but in the morning some of them went to see would there be any truth in it at all, and they seen the blood in the church and the track leading out in the snow; and, begorra, when they followed up on it, if they didn't find the deer dead!"

But, in spite of Dan's conversation, it was a long tramp, and when we reached the stream, that would in ordinary weather be a matter of twenty feet across, it was tearing down bank high, a wild water, and the heavy rain still falling made fishing seem hopeless. Worse still, as we made our way up the bank, and rounded the corner of a herd's hut, we came on a desperate array of rods and the biggest landing net I ever looked at—half as high as the rods and fit to take in a porpoise. These belonged to a detachment of the R.I.C., diversifying

their arduous duties. In less favoured counties they lean over a bridge and spit into the water; in Mayo they fish it. They were of opinion that the chance was poor, and as it was then nearly noon and they had reached the water by six (having some word of our intentions) they were disconsolate. Still, Dan was for pushing on, and my friend also was hopeful. For my own part, by the time I had fished half-a-dozen spots and hooked a score of floating rushes and other flotsam of a flood-water, I was more disconsolate than the police.

Nevertheless, Dan induced me to sit down and smoke my pipe (his unvarying counsel), and he put up one of his own big flies. I tried again, but with no success, and presently my friend, who understood this fishing, came up saying he had got a good trout and risen others. In the meantime I had left Dan with my rod at a spot I had fished repeatedly, and when I turned round, there he was into a fish; it jumped, and I saw a white trout of about a pound and a half. As I ran up with the net it got off, but plainly fish were going to be caught. We pushed on far up stream,

crossing a branch of the river more than knee-deep, and came to a dark-looking hole under a steep peat bank. The stream ran in under my side, and contrary to all my instincts, but obedient to Dan, I fished the farther side, throwing into water about three inches deep. There was a heavy rise, and I was into a fish that jumped: Dan said a trout, I said a grilse, but anyhow a fish well up to five pounds. I wish I had followed my own counsel and let him take his time, but Dan adjured me to drag him down stream. As I did so the bob-fly caught in the heather of a submerged bank, and left the fish free to wriggle himself off the tail. So we parted, and I decided that luck was never to come my way in the County Mayo. We went on up to another very similar hole, but still smaller—an active man could have jumped across it—and again I fished, and again the big fly was taken (I was fishing with only one now). Never in my life had I seen such a sporting fish. Down he went and down I went, stumbling among the hummocks and doing my best to steer him, for the stream was full of little islands

of green sod. He took me through one rapid, and I got him anxiously into slack water. Dan made a dive at him with the net (a small one), put it straight under him and spilt him off into the stream; and away he went down another short rapid. Finally, after two or three repetitions of this heartrending process, we got him in —a splendid fish, not fresh run of course, but in excellent condition, and weighing a good two pounds. My feelings towards Dan were very mixed at this moment. But as I went down stream again, they changed to unalloyed respect. It was my own conviction that a trout-fisher could divine all the likely throws by instinct, and I persisted in fishing many places where Dan said it was useless. Nowhere did I see a tail. But when I did as I was bid, and fished in little back-waters at particular spots—differing in no way that I could see from many others—I got fish, and in most cases I got them within a foot or so of the point in the run that Dan indicated. "There," he would say, as my fly travelled, "you should get him there." And then the deep rise and the tug would come, and away we

would go racing down another fifty yards, or perhaps a hundred, for there was no holding those fish in that stream.

As I went on, I began to see the reason of the instruction that I was not too proud to take. All the business of throwing your fly into the main stream, and dragging from the deep into the shallow, was just waste of time. Fish could not lie in that race of water. Where they did lie was just where the flood lipped the bank, and the place to fish with special care was the break in below a water-washed tuft of rushes, drawing the fly rather deep and very gently up stream. Most of the fish I got rose within six inches of the bank.

I did not get a wonderful number. But we forded the river, and when we came down opposite my friend he had four, and so had I, all well over a pound. Then, having hastily eaten hard eggs, I climbed round a steep cliff. Just as I got to the top, Dan discovered that he had left the basket, and ran back. I began fishing, and in a minute or two was into something big. It fought with short jerky tugs for a while in the hole, then took me into the rapids, I following and in much doubt how I was to

land it with the net, which in Dan's hands had made very poor work. He had missed fish time after time. However, I held my friend and began to see him—a trout after all; and finally, in the slackening between two short rapids, I picked a little bay in the bank, led him into it with the rod in my left hand, slipped the net up over his tail, and bundled him out. He was 3½ lbs. when he came to the scales, and I was prouder of that little feat than of the whole day's fishing. There is no doubt that we lose a great deal of excitement by employing people to gaff and land our fish.

Dan came up breathless, having run, as he said, like a hare when he seen me into him. So I went on down, fishing that bank only at prescribed points, and finding the fish come to order, till I expected Dan to call them by their names. I killed seven without mishap; the eighth I held up hard in a swift run for fear of spoiling the pool below. He jumped once or twice, then left me; but he was not a big one, and I had the pool—a lovely piece of water at a sharply defined elbow, with the race of water along the farther bank. In a minute I was into

another—a grilse, I thought, by the rise, but he was nothing so good. Still he was a fine trout, and with the other big one made 6 lbs. Then after a rest I started again from the bottom of the pool, and threw straight across—for the wind was contrary—and walked up, dragging towards me, through the slack water. Again there was a salmon-like swirl and a steady pull, but whether salmon or not I shall never know: and here is a point for controversy. I had lost one fish by using a bob-fly; but one large trout twice rose short at the single salmon-fly I had up, and Dan put up a smaller as bob which promptly fetched him. The same fly killed the largest of my fish. Now, however, I saw the other side of the question again: for this fish made a noble rush down the tail of the pool where a little island parted the current. I endeavoured to head him to my side but failed, and as he swept down, the bob-fly caught the rushes on the island for an instant, and he was off. Very likely he was no better a fish than the others—he certainly pulled no harder—but he had the charm of the unknown. Even the big fish

that I hooked first, and saw out of water before I lost him, haunts me less in regrets.

That was the end of the fast fishing. It was then about half-past four, and in four hours I had killed eight fish. I fished out the rest of the water to the limit of some one's boundary, over some likely holes, but never stirred a fin. Then I came up again, and, seeing no sight of my friend, sent up Dan to look for him and went back on a piece of water which I had noted as a flying trout tore through it with me after him. And here I got another two-pounder, but out in mid-stream now, for the water was falling; and, possibly, he had his fill of bank feeding. At least when I beached him on the head he disgorged slugs, green caterpillars, and a strange miscellany of edibles. Then my friend came down, and as we fished down to the ford, Dan shouted, "He's into one," and I answered, "So am I." That made me ten, to his eight; and when we crossed the river and began to pack for the tramp, the fish filled the two baskets brim-full. Dan had a solid weight slung over his back as he tramped the mountain—the eighteen fish scaled 28 lbs.

"I have been very happy," my friend remarked when we met; and so had I. And we were in capital spirits going over the hill, especially as we were on our way to greet another man who was joining us in spite of the blackest representations of the chances.

But when I look back on that day of fighting strong fish in strong water with a twelve-foot rod, what I think of chiefly is the fish I lost. True, I hooked thirteen and killed ten—not a bad average; but when I think of the fish I did see, and still more of the fish I did not see, I could shed tears.

Nevertheless, I owe to Dan the best day's angling I ever had. Without him I should probably have killed only about half; with him I did better than a vastly better fisherman, whose methods Dan used to hold up to me for imitation, for he was unsparing in his criticism. I got all the fish on flies of his tying; and the big fly killed, I think, thirteen or fourteen good fish before I lost it, and I shall be proud to send his address to any one who wants it. But the real help lay in his knowledge of the river. Natural divination is not so possible on a stream in flood; what you want, then, is minute local

knowledge, and that Dan had acquired in all the ways legal and illegal. He told us, as we sat by one pool, how he and a cobbler had taken out of it one day fourteen salmon and twenty-five trout—of course with a net; and how the rewards offered for the capture of him had amounted to twenty-five pounds.

It is no wonder, for Dan was the worst type of poacher—the poacher who knows the law. Once in his career he had been in charge of a net fishery, and consequently he had the Acts of Parliament by heart. An incident which he dwelt upon with pleasure was the discomfiture of a young and zealous policeman who, meeting Dan on the road with a net, confiscated the engine. The matter was referred from the district inspector to the county inspector, and from the county inspector to the crown prosecutor, and the end was that the policeman took a walk to Dan's cottage with the net, and propitiated his family with half-a-crown.

However, the pitcher goes often to the water, and although a man must be taken, not merely in the possession of poached fish, but in the act of fishing (so at least this pundit laid down the law), Dan was taken

at the last. Another incident which he dwelt on repeatedly was the extraordinary goodwill shown him by the magistrates, who were many of them his valued friends. And, indeed, a man who is useful to anglers is apt to find well-wishers on the bench. They inflicted the smallest fine possible, but I was indiscreet enough to inquire if it was paid. Dan had accepted the alternative, and that was why he went to England this year. For Dan had a wife, and she said to him, "Dan, they'll hang you next time; you must give it over," and so Dan, at least for the present and on his own showing, has sunk from the profitable business of a poacher who sends parcels to Dublin by His Majesty's mails, to being a mere candidate for the post of a watcher of waters, and a seeker after commissions to tie flies.

There are those who will regard my friend with the eye of intolerance, but apart from his engaging personality he was an interesting type of his class. Turned of fifty, he was erect, active, square-shouldered, and soldierly. He told us, indeed, with pride, how in his English experiences a party had been round looking for deserters,

and he had at once been bidden to stand aside from the gang of mowers. It was probably America that had smartened him, for he had gone to the States in his youth—partly along of a quarrel with his father over the land, partly because there was a girl that "shlighted" him. That was why Dan, unlike the most in that country, had not married till well up in years. In the States he had worked in coal-mines, and had many reminiscences touching his experiences there; and he had peddled goods with a Polish assistant, and had a few phrases of the speech which he trotted out for our edification. But, in his opinion, it was a "very dishtressing language for the mouth." Two years had made him homesick, and he returned to his little holding of eight acres, for which he paid four pounds rent. With the holding went rights of pasture, which would suffice for six young beasts; but Dan was no capitalist, and could not stock it. The holding would scarcely produce as much as would keep him and a family, let alone the rent, and so Dan must either get his rent out of the salmon or go, like the rest of the people about, to harvest

work. He had bad luck, too, for one of his small boys had got an inflamed leg, and the local doctors were for taking it off, but Dan insisted on Dublin and a hospital, and took the child up himself. Seven or eight pounds went that way, but the "little foot of him" was saved. There was no sign of any great devotion to "the wife," as he always called her, but he never spoke of his children without tenderness, and used to fill his pockets with small trout that we would otherwise have thrown back. For, as he explained ingenuously to me, the childher could not understand why it was he was not bringing back fish with him now, when he was going to the river. He told me too, with pride, how he had found the small boys working a net in an old midden-pond beside his house. If poaching is a sin, I fear Dan was a very impenitent sinner.

Sinner or not, he was, to my mind, very good company, and, like many Irish peasants, a connoisseur in talk. Again and again I have heard him describe a person as "a very conversible man." There was a cousin of his whom he wanted to bring over from ten miles off to spend the evening with me

—a man who had all the history of Ireland by heart. This pleasure is reserved for another year possibly, but one of Dan's friends I did meet. He was the leading citizen in Barmouth, and Dan referred to him several times as an authority on ghosts, and offered to introduce me. Dan himself had seen no ghosts—except, indeed, that once in his young days, when he was employed to watch the water, he thought he saw three fellows with nets, but when he had them in a corner they vanished through his hands. The leading citizen also told me a very similar story; but from what I came to know of Barmouth, I should require strong evidence to convince me that any appearance of persons netting or burning the water was in any way out of the ordinary. And anyhow, it was a hopeful tale for us, who had to fish in a river that was poached, not only by the living, but by the dead. My concern, however, is with the living, and I took more interest in the leading citizen, whom I shall call Mr. O'Malley, than in his ghosts.

It was late when we got home that night, and Dan had to array himself in Sunday best

and secure permission to present me ; so that finally I sallied out under his escort about the time one starts for a crush in the London season. But Gaelic Ireland is neither early to bed nor early to rise, and keeps London hours. There was not much look of London, though, about the night when we went into the blackness and groped our way down the stony grass-grown cart track—Dan anxious to support me, for it was part of his belief that one could scarcely walk alone, and with great difficulty on several occasions we put aside his offers to carry us pick-a-back across flood rivers. We gained the street, and Mr. O'Malley opened the door to us himself and led the way upstairs to his parlour on the first floor. Except the hotel and the post-office, no other house in Barmouth had a second story ; but Mr. O'Malley was builder and contractor as well as farmer, general dealer, and (of course) publican ; and he had built the house for himself. In short, Mr. O'Malley was the kind of leading citizen that flourishes in these outlying parts of Ireland, and there are not a few like him in the House of Commons : I was not surprised to learn that he had been suggested as a

candidate for that august assembly. Perhaps it does not greatly matter, under existing circumstances, whom Ireland sends to Westminster; but if Ireland is going to manage her local affairs seriously, they might be in much worse hands than in those of men like Mr. O'Malley. I looked close at him as he sat down at the head of his table with Dan on his left and me on his right, among the elegant furniture of a room only used on rare occasions; and he was an impressive type: a huge man with a Newgate fringe, and huge bushy eyebrows that went up when he talked—more like a blacksmith than a shopkeeper, and for good reason. On the end of the chapel was a large Maltese cross, hewn out of a single stone, not satisfactory as a work of art, but an admirable piece of stone-cutting; and that was the work and the gift of Mr. O'Malley. And his talk was the talk of a man who reasoned, rightly or wrongly, but who reasoned with gusto on all manner of subjects.

We began, of course, with the fishing, and the decay of the Breugach river. For this Mr. O'Malley enumerated on emphatic fingers a variety of reasons, of which the most cogent to

me were the competition among the nets and the increased facility for transport. But his darling theory was a meteorological one, and went back to the hard winter of 1894-1895, when in the early months, just as the spawn was maturing, there came an extraordinary succession of quick changes, warm thaw and bitter frost, then thaw and frost again. All this he set out ponderously in the Johnsonian manner, and patted himself over the conclusion. "Wasn't that a good theory now?" And Dan, sitting opposite me in his best coat and clean collar and green tie, with his grey moustache brushed back, and his eyes fixed on the speaker in an attitude of polite attention, while all the humorous wrinkles about the corners of them were marked by the lamplight, said that it was a very reasonable theory indeed. From fishing we passed to education, and Mr. O'Malley was very anxious about the effect of certain new regulations, which, in his opinion, would interfere with a pupil's chance of pushing far on in mathematics —the branch of learning to which Irish peasants take most readily. But time was getting on, and we had come there to draw

Mr. O'Malley about ghosts; and Dan, with great determination, yet with a tact that could not be surpassed, led the conversation to the supernatural. He himself, I may say, made profession of an entire disbelief, but was superstitious to the very bone. He told me another day of the awful scare he got when he was left by an outgoing dispensary doctor in charge of the house. By way of reward Dan was to have such fishing tackle as was left behind; and at the fall of night he came in to take up his quarters. He was beginning to investigate the spoils, when in a large box he came upon the doctor's usual stock-in-trade—a skeleton. He described to me vividly the conflict in his mind between the desire to fly and the fear lest, if he did so, some one might come in and raid the tackle, and how he decided eventually to keep a candle burning and watch the box all night for fear something might come out of it. "Why would you be frightened?" I asked; but Dan did not argue. "For why would I not?" was all he had to say.

Mr. O'Malley's attitude was different. He did not wish to appear superstitious: the whole tenor of his discourse was to

convince me by good and solid reasons that there was something in it—that he had only yielded to conclusive and material evidence. For instance, once on a winter night he and two others had made an expedition to burn the water, and while they were waiting for the suitable hour he had left his allies in the cottage playing cards, and gone off about some business. As he was returning along the river he saw on the other bank a spark, "And, says I to myself, those boys are careless, and if I was with them I'd be at them with a stick. For you see," he explained, "the way we do is, we keep a coal of peat with hay twisted round it, and you carry that inside of your coat; and I thought these boys were letting the sparks fly out and maybe giving a sign to whoever would be watching. And then I saw more sparks, and more on the top of that, and, thinks I, 'Oh, faith, you've done it this time, and it's yourselves you may thank for it.' And then I seen a right blaze-up of the torch, as if they were fishing, and that lasted for maybe three or four minutes, and then out went the torch just on a sudden, and says I to myself, 'It's a chase.' And

away with me up to the house. But sure, just as I came on the bend of the river at the ford, there was the blaze again, and I came over to the bank, and I seen the men stripped in the water, and the pikes in their hands; and while I was looking, the whole went out of my sight as if you snuffed a candle. And, would you believe me now, when I got up to the cottage, there was the men sitting where I left them, at the cards, and the candle burnt nigh out to the socket. And says I, 'Boys, were you fishing?' and they said they had never stirred; and, sure, you would know that by the candle being burnt out. And that set me to the thinking, and when I began to think of the place where I seen the light squinched on a sudden, it was clear to me."

Then he entered on a long description to Dan of the precise spot—easily done, for every ford and hole in that river had its own name; and the effect was to show that when the light went out just like a snuff it must have been ten perches—"Ay, or as much as a hundred and fifty yards," put in Dan—away from the water. "And, you know, a big torch like that—for it was a right big flare—couldn't

be squinched that way without you dipped it in the water; you would need to hit it on the ground three or four times, ay, and nine or ten times, and there would be sparks. So when the torch was squinched that way in the field, wasn't it a proof now that there was something shupernatural in it?'

I thought, anyhow, that, supernatural or not, there was no want of local colour in the story, nor of individual character in the point of view. And perhaps I may add Mr. O'Malley's experience of a leprechaun, which is a kind of dwarf or gnome, sometimes seen along roadsides and elsewhere; and the man who catches a leprechaun can force it to show him hid treasure. It was when Mr. O'Malley had the conthrack for building the bridge up at Ballyduff, and, said he, "One of the men looked up from the stone-working, and he seen the thing on the ditch making signs to him, and says he, 'There's a leprechaun,' and the whole of them flung down their hammers and away with them to run. And I called out to them, 'Come back out of that, boys, you'll be the talk of the country for fools; it's only one of Mick Murphy's gossoons.' And so they stopped,

and the whole of us looked at the wee fellow, and him standing there on the bank, signing with his arms this way to come on" (and his huge arms went up and made windmills in towards his chest), "and I took a good survey of it, for, thinks I to myself, it's surely smaller than natural. And I manœuvred the way I would get a sight of it against a telegraph post, thinking to myself that would give me a trigonometrical dimension; and when I seen that the post came out this side and that beyond it, I says to myself, 'That's a trigonometrical proof now that there's a shupernatural in it.' And away it went, still beckoning and signing, and says I to one of the boys, 'Go and see what's in it at all,' and he followed it, and it away through the heather, duking and diving, till he lost it. And, faith, I was sorry often since that I called the boys off it the first time."

The Psychical Research Society would not give much for such evidence, and I only tell it for the character. But there was one story which Dan and Mr. O'Malley told between them—for in point of fact Mr. O'Malley was a little unwilling to speak

about so serious a matter, and remained so up to one o'clock when we departed. Dan explained to me next morning that he would not have moved so early, only that the next day was a market. "Only for that we would not have stirred till five, or maybe six, when Pat O'Malley had another bottle, or a bottle and a half, of whisky inside him, and it's then we would have got that story the right way from him." As it was, in my opinion we had all got quite enough whisky inside of us. A heavy responsibility was on me the whole evening, for the others would only raise their glasses when I did; and make the pace as slow as I could, there were always fresh fillings and fresh protestations, and "Oh, now, be dambut," winding up when we departed with "A morning glass now." The story cost me a headache, but I got it in the end—the story of St. Brigid's Flood, which has been told already.

But I may add here another detail as to the victims of the flood and the curse. "The last of them that was found, it was by a man that was waiting to cross the river away below in the ford at the tide-water,

and it was to be low water at midnight. And it was the full of the moon, and he waited till it was twelve o'clock, and then he waded the ford, and what was the first thing he seen but a dead corp lying up in the moonlight. And what did he do? He took it up on his back and carried it the length of the nearest house, maybe two hundher yards and more. Wasn't that a courageous man now?"

It may seem an odd use of the word courageous, but Dan's use of adjectives was wholly individual. "Did I ever tell you what happened at the wedding of Pat O'Malley's grandfather? He was a well-doing man, and there was a great gathering for his marriage, and the house that they were going to was away over west there beyond the river. An' there was a lot of them came from far, and they had no knowledge of the fords; an' they went to the house of a man that was living there, and he was a very dhroll man, an' they asked him could he show them the ford. An' he said he could surely, thinking he would get a good smather of the whisky they had in a jar with them. But they gave him none,

and whatever kind of a ford he showed them there was two of them drowned—two fine, able young men. Oh, he was a very dhroll man." As for Pat O'Malley, Dan had always the same word to describe him: he was "a very funny man"—"the funniest talker ever you listened to." Funny in the ordinary sense Mr. O'Malley certainly was not; but here is what Dan meant by it. We were up the river one day, and fishing off a narrow strip of sward between a ditch and the steep bank, when Dan began: "Well, now, isn't Pat O'Malley the funny man? One day he was over there where you're casting to, and he seen two weasels coming out on this bank to fight. An' they fought, and he watched them; an' they fought an' fought. An' the big one was too hard for the little one, and after a while the little one began to try for to run in up this bank, but the big fellow was for killing him all out, and got in front of him every time. 'An',' says Pat to me, 'when I seen the big one that cruel, bedam but I went into the river' (an' it up to his waist, mind you) 'and across with me and a stone in my hand, an' I was wild to kill the big fellow

that wouldn't let the little one go when he had him bet.' Oh, he's the funny man, Pat O'Malley."

In other ways Dan's conversation was set with felicities, as, for example, when he brought me the top of my rod rehabilitated after an accident, and measuring it against the spare top declared that "there wasn't the black of your nail between them." But I can no more catch the trick of his expression than I could his way of working the flies. The day before I left we killed a grilse in a big pool, which a strong flood had filled with fish. I then fished that pool up and down for well over an hour; then, yielding to Dan's importunities, I gave him my rod. In five minutes he was into another fish, and I ultimately gaffed it for him in the middle of a briar bush.

The days of Dan and all this amiable confraternity of salmon thieves are numbered, I fear me; for my sympathies are with the old days and the old ways, when there might be poaching, but there was also good fishing. As the railway pushes onward, London and the other great maws extend their tentacles.

Et jam defecit nostrum mare, dum gula sævit,
Retibus assiduis penitus scrutante macello
Proxima, nec patimur Tyrrhenum crescere piscem.'

As it was in Juvenal's time, so it is now. The demands of the market keep the nets eternally at work ; and besides that, the West of Ireland will soon be even as Scotland, where you need to pay the eyes out of your head for leave to throw a line. I have told how we were convicted of poaching on a stream where every rod had always hitherto been free. No doubt it is all for the best, and I should be inclined to think that the lodge which we occupied will seldom go another six years untenanted ; but civilisation will need to remove the mouldy blue paint, which was, as we learnt, an afterthought. One of the previous tenants had given a local tradesman a lump sum to paper and paint it, leaving the tradesman to choose the papers. Being a sportsman, he selected a large bold design of a hound coursing a hare, but unluckily the paperhanger in most places had put the paper wrong side up, and this spectacle of the inverted hound and hare preyed upon the tenant till he ordered its destruction. A

coat of whitewash and half-a-dozen clean deck-chairs would have made the little lodge quite pleasant to live in; and indeed, thanks to the invaluable Francis, it was by no means too bad. "The best cook in County Mayo," whom he had engaged for us, proved to be a pretty girl with large, dark, mysterious eyes, who ran away when any one spoke to her; and the toughness of the mutton at our first meal was a thing to be remembered. After a day or two, and some protests, things mended surprisingly, and the trout in particular were done with an artistic touch that we could not explain, till one day, descending with a pair of wet stockings, I found Francis buttering the fish in the frying-pan. My host questioned him, and he seemed a little confused. "Ah, well," he said, "I was disappointed in Mary, and I didn't like to vex your honour, so I just took and did it." That is the great blessing in Ireland. When you get a good, willing man, he can and will put his hand to anything, and his one thought is to oblige you. There was no end to the things that Francis did, and he did them all as if it was a pleasure to do them.

Apart from the fishing, which would be excellent if it were given a fair chance, and the shooting, both of grouse and mixed game, which ought to be first-rate, there are few charms in that wild corner of Mayo. On a clear day, when you saw the craggy bulk of Achill standing up out of the sea beyond twenty miles of rolling brown expanse, there was beauty in it; on a wet day it was forlorn beyond words. And on my homeward way, as I rode up the river valley in bright sunshine past the shining pools of the river, it was fair enough; but when I crested the watershed and looked over toward Killala Bay and the wooded country about Lough Conn, the relief to the eye was unspeakable. Cycling into Ballina that lovely day, after the wet week, was a real joy; passing through a country full of rich crops and fine plantations, not battered and sodden, but drenched and saturated with seasonable rain, one could almost feel the exultation of the earth in its fertility; and even the grey slated houses of the county town took a warmth and beauty in the glow of evening. Yet I would not willingly libel that barren waste where I spent ten pleasant days in rain

and shine; its folk were kindly, and often picturesque. One old man in blue tail-coat with brass buttons made a link with the past, and the barefooted girls, though they had not the rich beauty of Connemara, were graceful and sweet-eyed; free altogether from the lumpiness of English rustics. Healthy enough they looked; but, whether it was their eyes, or the transparency of their complexions, they continually reminded me of an Irish poet's line—

Diaphaneity, the spirit's beauty.

There was a touch of romance in their carriage and the freshness of heather blossom in their face. I do not wonder my friend Dan took himself off to America, if he set his heart on one of them and she "shlighted" him.

VI

THE REEDY LAKE

JULY 1903.—Where I write, here at Ardcolumb, we are on a salmon river; for the Owenmore flows from Lough Columb and has a course of some five rocky miles before it is joined by a considerable burn and settles down to be, for the most part, a flat, deep, slow-running canal till it reaches Drummond lake—though varied in places with beautiful runs and pools. But this upper portion is virtually a flood-water, and before the end of June fish hardly reach it. This June was droughty, and there is probably not a salmon in the whole stretch; so that trout-fishing, which is always the staple here, is now our sole resource; and though the river holds fair-sized trout, at present, with all the rocks bare, it is hopeless to angle for them, unless you do as a skilful friend of mine has just

come in from doing, and try the Stewart tackle with a worm.

I desire to speak respectfully of what we call in Ulster "the garden-fly"; but I have never used it, and should certainly never begin where lures cleaner to handle are still efficacious, as they are on these waters. Yesterday was as typical a day as any of what we mean in this country by ordinary good lake fishing.

Lough Columb might tempt one to fish it by its extraordinary beauty; for the whole valley of the Owenmore is richly wooded, and nowhere do trees combine more charmingly with mountain than in the fine demesne on the south side of the lough. All the little islands, too, with which it is studded, carry trees, except one cluster of bare rocks where the gulls breed; and the water folds itself into graceful curving bays. But, for all this, we mostly leave Lough Columb unfished, for, though it abounds with trout, it cannot nourish them, and they grow puny and ill-nurtured—running six or seven to the pound. And only a quarter of a mile off, across a level of swamp and rushes, are two other loughs, one of which

—the smaller—we do not fish, because we are not let; on the other, Lough-na-Mrack, we can angle as often as we will on the payment of a small ransom, and may be sure that, however many trout we catch, it will be just as possible next day to get fifty, or a hundred even.

And so you are to picture two of us starting out a little after ten, down the avenue, past a gigantic bush of rhododendron, whose blossom is now mostly a purple carpet on the ground, and so under fine beeches and sycamores to the gate; then crossing the road to a flagged stile, and over on to a rough lea-field, where peewits whirl distractedly about us on their slow-beating wings, crying and crying. To this accompaniment we pass along a grassy track with the swamp on our left showing greens of every tint; dark glossy belts of spear-reeds, broad glossy leaves of water-lilies with flowers white and yellow; here and there even a spike of bogbean blossom, tall as a horse-chestnut's, and not unlike it. And, shading down to these growths of the water, are all the innumerable types of vegetation which grow where moist swamp meets dry

land—on your right, hazel scrub and endless bracken, with heather beyond it; to your left, the bog mosses and rushes; on the margin of the lake, the glossy blue water forget-me-not, rich spikes of purple orchis, glossy bog buttercup, the fiery brown of marsh cinquefoil; and more profuse than these, everywhere blue thrift and red rattle, small familiar flowers that grow in all the places where one tramps for trout and salmon in summer, or for snipe and duck in winter.

Dear to me from childhood has been the little pink rattle with its pinkish opaque stems. I can never see it but it calls up a corner of unreclaimed marshy ground beyond which grew a planting of Scotch firs, in which—being some five minutes from the old house—bears lived when we were children. Here I should hardly recognise my old friend, for it grows, not as I knew it there, a weed two inches high squat among the mosses, but rising and spreading into a handsome spike, tall as any hyacinth and as well furnished. And near by where it grows, on the very track to the stone pier, are groves of bog-myrtle. High as your knee,

yes and higher, it presses round you, a little nearer the bog than the bracken cares to spread; and even while you smoke on your way to the boat, you cannot be unconscious of its clean, pungent, resinous fragrance. Dearer to me than the red wild roses of this country, dearer even than the heath-bells, are its dusky green foliage and its dry reddish stems.

The hazel copse, an untraversable jungle, sheltering belated bluebells and primroses, closes down upon the very shore of the lake; and here, at the limit of the tall reeds, is the little stone landing-pier, and here should be our boat and our boatman. Here, however, they are not; and I have to leave my friend fishing off the pier, and go round by the head of the lake to the cottage opposite. As I approach it across the bog, I see at the door—for the house stands high—an unmistakable figure slowly shrugging himself into a coat, and he comes down the hill to meet me; a spare-built, dour-looking northern, with bright orange beard, dressed in Norfolk jacket and knickers, whose cut speaks of a London tailor; and for the final elegance

he wears a striped waistcoat. All these garments, the benefactions of our predecessors, are ragged enough, but still he wears them with an air ; and you could tell the man a hundred yards off for a follower of sportsmen.

After reproaches and excuses we go down to where the boat lies beached snug enough among the reeds ; but it is two men's work poling her out in the present lowness of the water. Then a short paddle brings across to where my friend waits.

Lough-na-Mrack is about a mile long ; and, like a hundred others, has a swamp at either end, east and west, and hills north and south to guard it. The southward hill is covered with hazel and heather ; on the northern slope, tilled land reaches far up, and at the limit of the tilled land is one of the tiny churches which date from the early days of Irish Christianity, with one of the ancient and weather-worn stone crosses standing by it. There is nothing strikingly beautiful about the lake, though from the west end you have a fine glimpse of Errigal's serrated top, the highest peak in Ulster. But the eye of a fisherman rests

with tenderness upon that thickly-peopled little stretch of water.

The breeze was westerly, and just about as much of it as one would wish ; a good strong ripple before us on the water,—too strong, we decided, for the smallest size of flies, though we both fished with very fine casting-lines. When the first drift took us down near to a little island that marks almost the halfway, we had caught perhaps half-a-dozen, but my friend had risen many more than I. Fishing would not account for it all, though I was with one of the best anglers I have ever seen ; and when he began to rise them at every cast while I saw nothing, it was time to try a change of flies. His fish were coming to the cock-a-bundy, and my only example of the fly was a very large pattern tied on coarse gut. I put it up, very stupidly, on the bob, spoiling the set of my cast ; and as we fished across the lake, though trout began to rise, I got nothing, while he still scored ; but then came a better rise and my cock-a-bundy was into the best fish we had seen. We guessed him at three-quarters, but I regret to say that he did not turn the

kitchen scales at half-a-pound, and we had no more accurate appliances. And, after all, perhaps even kitchen scales are more to be trusted than an angler's conjecture.

As we crossed back by the reeds we dropped our passenger, my friend's wife, who had been fishing on her own account with a dredge for fresh-water algæ. She was welcome to all she could get, for in all these lakes weed becomes a nuisance from June onward. At the halting-place we reorganised our casts, and I discarded the march-brown which on two or three previous days had been my main stand-by. The orange grouse, also a fly of honour, was set aside, and a small black Zulu and small red spinner, with the heavy cock-a-bundy where it should be, on the tail, completed my equipment; and so armed, I started fresh and began to make up some lee-way. Fish kept rising freely, but taking short; I doubt if either of us fished ten casts without a rise; and, though we did no wonders, we kept getting them. Moreover, there was no time wasted; we did not tangle our tackle, or let it foul the boat; we brought the fish clean and

handy to the net, and we had a really handy boatman, who whipped the fly out without spoiling it or wasting moments. Now and then there would be a mild stir, for now and then a trout of the larger size made his appearance; the breeze, though falling, held fairly; the day was pleasant, grey, cloudy and warm; and the fish, small as they were, by no means came aboard without a struggle. When we reached the top again it was two o'clock and we spread our catch on the bank: two dozen and four, and of the thirteen which we took home, any four were able to turn the scale against a pound—even on the unflattering kitchen implement.

We lunched peaceably, taking our time; and when we had finished, behold the wind was away. Five minutes went in rigging casts with tiny midge-flies, and we started again to brush through the bog myrtle and flag-signal across the lake for our boat. There was a tiny curl at first, and my friend on second thoughts decided to avoid the very small flies. I tried them, and after a fruitless quarter of

an hour gave it up. The lake was now all dimpled over with small deep rises, trout sucking down some imperceptible fly on the water. Yet though we threw over every rising fish within reach, those that we got—and we got plenty—were mostly not those that we had seen break the water. But after an hour or less, the tiny breath of air dropped and left the water smooth as oil: so windless it was that midges began to play about the boat, hatching out, I suppose, from their nests in the timbers. We fished on steadily, for the trout were rising in hundreds after their own game; and it was now that science began to tell. Fish after fish my friend got in that dead calm; and the boatman, almost incredulous, could only say that it beat all ever he saw. He had one advantage, for the little cock-a-bundy which they were taking was his tail-fly; I had it on the dropper, and the dodge was to drop the cast very light on the water and let it sink before you began to draw; thus, since the running line sank first, the tail-fly remained floating for a moment. It was, in fact, a

modified dry-fly fishing, and, candidly, I could make little of it. But my friend caught a fish steadily every seven or eight minutes.

Thus, hopeless as it seemed, the score mounted till we asked a question and the boatman said, "How many do you think you are short of the four dozen?" It was only two we wanted; and we both exclaimed that those two would probably keep us out all night—both of us having experienced again and again the perversity of trout when you are trying to complete a score. But this day it was easier; I got one at once of the smaller six-to-the-pound size; and then by an odd chance, two fish took me at the same moment—a thing that had not happened to me before that day. It was disconcerting, for the fish on the tail-fly was the largest we had seen, and he had the better chance to get off; but luckily the small one on the bob disappeared and I squared off the four dozen with a fish good three-quarters of a pound. A little curl had risen by this, the breeze veering round to the

east; and with the change the rise went off. Our basket was just fifty, omitting three or four thrown back—say ten pounds' weight of fish—and I suppose we had fished seven hours.

That is what you may call a fair typical day on Lough-na-Mrack—nothing out of the way, but very pleasant. I do not suppose that we hooked one fish in five of those that rose at us; at certain times my friend was rising them with every cast. And on a good day, by his reckoning, two rises out of three should see fish hooked. I should put it nearer one in two myself for small trout. But the better the day on these loughs, the bigger the trout taken, as well as the more numerous.

It is easy to cry down fishing of this sort. There is no great excitement, for you are morally sure never to hook anything that cannot be safely played on the very finest tackle; and, moreover, drawn gut is a superfluous refinement with such free-rising fish. But if one compares a day like this, in which there is not five minutes but one rod or the other sees fish, against the long hours spent on a salmon river, which are

enlivened, perhaps, by a couple of rises, possibly by one capture, it is plain enough there is a good deal to be said for the lake. Add to this that there is always the pleasure of company, and in this case it added materially to my enjoyment. I was glad, for one thing, of some one else—not to laugh, but to twinkle when our red-bearded boatman made one of the slips common enough among these folk. "Father Doherty would say that was a fine trout now," he said, with a touch of superior condescension as he held up a well-shaped fish of some five or six ounces. But if there was a touch of scorn for the priest, there was also a touch of resentment in our want of respect for the class of fish produced by his lake. We hastened to turn the conversation by asking who exactly Father Doherty was. "One of them priests that teaches in the cemetery," was the answer. "The dead languages I suppose he teaches," said my friend. But Charlie felt that he was a little out of his depth, and wisely relapsed into silence, probably feeling that his shot at "Seminary" had miscarried.

However, Charlie was as well qualified as

any man to understand a pretty rejoinder, which was related to us when I turned the talk on to Gaelic. Just about here the language has nearly gone out, but nearer the sea across the mountain all use it; and it seems that an English tourist driving there on a car was struck by the fact that his driver greeted every one in Irish, but kept on with his cries of "Get on out of that," "Get up now," to the horse. In a rash moment the tourist hinted that his driver was making a parade of his accomplishments. "Why do you speak English to the horse, Neddy?" "Sure, your honour, 'tis good enough for him," came the answer quick as a flash. Who could put a taunt more prettily?

But if I have met with boatmen who were better company than Charlie Murray, I have not seen many handier with a boat. Without being a good oar—with, indeed, a great reluctance to pull his ship up wind—he showed excellent skill once one was into a fish in keeping the boat on the fishing-ground and clear of the casting line; he was quick and handy with the net, quick and handy at disengaging the fly. And he

practised a refinement which I have never met before, for, instead of leaving the fish to drift about in dirty water at the bottom of the boat, he dropped them neatly into a clean tin pail.

Whoever has fished lakes much will realise the importance of these things. An inexpert man lets the boat blunder down on the taut line, tangles the flies in his oar if he gets half a chance, and when the cast has to be extricated from the side—as constantly happens if the tail-fly trails overboard while a fish is being taken off the bob—fails to extricate it. On the other hand, we might take credit to ourselves that we spared him pretty well all the trouble that could be spared. We led our fish to the net instead of asking him to plunge through the boat diving after the dodging trout; we kept our casts clear of each other, and if the flies tangled—as they must occasionally do with three or four up on fine gut—we disentangled them, and I do not think either of us ever wasted much more than thirty seconds on the business.

These are the things that tell in lake-fishing, and you may add to them dis-

crimination in the choice and changing of flies. Some men persist that to stick to your original cast and save all the time you can is the true method; but I would have none of this. Two men in this kind of fishing should be in a partnership, and should always start, if possible, with a good variety of flies on the two casts. Once the taking pattern is established — and there always is some one pattern better than others—both should have it up, but not necessarily in the same size; and there is still room for experiment. On the day I speak of we both did a fair deal of changing, and except my experiment with the midge-flies, all of it was justified. I would be prepared to lay that two novices would hardly have killed two dozen where we got four, and certainly that in the afternoon they would have done little or nothing. And though we did not keep our scores, I am very sure that my own share of the fifty was very little, if at all, over twenty.

Of course one assumes light rod and light tackle with flies of the right sorts—no very difficult matter to secure, but some come unprovided. I fished one day last

week and got three dozen to my rod, while the other man in the boat, using a lumpy rod and coarse gut, went off with little over the dozen. On such a day as that was, the pair of us who fished the day I have described could probably have got close on a hundred, for I began late and left off early. I see a record here from last season of a single rod's basket which came very close on 20 lbs., and made over the hundred fish.

These details I add for the angler proper. But even the novice or the half-interested will realise the charm of the continuous mild excitement maintained during quick-running hours, adrift in soft wind on a day, sometimes of soft rain, sometimes breaking into sun, with fish always showing; and also of the continuous need for small dexterities, quick takings in of line, the strike sharp and quick, the fly swiftly re-thrown over the fish that has missed it. All these things go to make up a delightful day; and there is the great attraction that one can count upon it with reasonable assurance.

Here, as in most mountain lakes, days of

bright sun and dead calm are infrequent; with any sort of a breeze sun should be little hindrance. But there are many days in the year when a boat can scarcely be kept in position on these lakes, such is the strength of the wind; and Loch-na-Mrack gets little shelter from the west and south-west. On such days, even if a boatman can be persuaded to go out, it is hardly fair to take him; he probably goes to avoid disobliging a stranger, and the amount of labour employed in getting a couple of dozen trout—and perhaps not so many, for the fish do not rise free with breaking water—is out of all proportion to the result. It is not a bad thing for an angler to try his hand occasionally at taking one of these heavy boats up against the wind: the experience breeds consideration. And on such days there is no period of rest, for the drift would go too quick and the man must hold his boat against the wind even when the anglers are at work.

When a day like this comes, it is well for the man who has a pair of waders. Lough-na-Mrack can be fished for a considerable extent by walking in some thirty

inches of water, and so can many of the small lakes with which Donegal is studded. A wise friend of mine tells me that as a precaution he always takes this equipment, as it is disappointing to go a journey and find yourself either unable to fish at all, or blown off the lough. I record the hint for the benefit of my readers, but warn them that long waders rather than thigh boots are the wear, as even in shallow water, when the wind is blowing, it is easy, and most disagreeable, to ship a sea.

VII

A RAID TO CUSHINASS

THE worst of salmon is that they spoil one's peaceable enjoyment of brown trout. When we arrived this year at Lough Columb, it was the end of a long and troublesome journey ; and driving up here, on to the little peninsula where the pleasant hotel stands, it seemed the most desirable thing in life just to put a rod together, string up a cast of flies, and run down under the trees to the shore of the lake. It was not yet sundown, but the cool grey of evening was stealing up, a light ripple was on the water, and the faint plash of "lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore" wrought on my nerves like a spell. A soft coolness was shed about me, after all the racket and hurry of trains and steamers, and the racket and hurry of London that lay behind them ;

and I fished hastily and eagerly, content enough to feel the rod spring in my hand and watch the cast straighten itself out to light on the water. I caught nothing; I knew there was nothing in that shallow worth catching; I do not remember that I even rose a tiny trout. But these few first minutes appeased a thirst that lies deep in the country-bred, however we may learn to love our dwelling in cities. Strolling by the lake without a rod I should have been unsatisfied; as it was, with the familiar pursuit in full swing, I could drink in half-consciously all the familiar beauty of lake and jutting shore, with wooded slope, and heathy mountain beyond them.

So it was for a day or two, a week or two even; I was content to wait for a flood that came not, before the keener excitement of strong silvery creatures to fish for should be added. But the flood delayed unreasonably, and what was worse, I began to write about sea-pools and white trout fishing; desires for a change and a chance rose strong, and at a sudden whim I started on an expedition.

Lough Columb and the Owenmore be-

long to the northern watershed of Donegal; but the range of mountains which rise at the western end of the lake are the only division between us and rivers that fall out into the Atlantic from the coast that faces America. The nearest of these was not available, and I had a full thirty miles to cover before I could reach my sea-pool. Still it would be a change; I could fish an afternoon and a morning, and be back next night.

There was choice of roads: one down the Barra river and across to Ballyglen; the other to Bunlin, whence a train would take me a matter of seven miles—downhill miles, and therefore despicable; and in either case from Ballyglen I must ride to Cushinass, my haven of hope. Choice was slightly influenced by the fact that our hotel contained no railway guide, and the time of a train in Bunlin was matter for conjecture; but my hostess was clear that the mail reached Ballyglen at half-past one, so that the uncertainty did not weigh with me; in fact, it was completely brushed aside when an English acquaintance in the hotel hinted that it was well to have

detailed information as to the hour of a train. Nevertheless I started with my mind made up for the Barra valley; but when I reached the point (about a mile beyond Lough Columb) where the glen turns to the right hand, I saw the road winding up and up, with wide curves, to the head of the pass, and felt the fine mountain breeze blowing full down it; and my heart failed. Your hardy cyclist chooses a road where he need never dismount; but, to my thinking, there is no worse torment to a man in haste to reach his destination than a long, long hill, which can be ridden and should be ridden. So, at the sight, I turned sharp to my left where a road skirting a ravine in the mountain went up like the roof of a house. Here, at least, there was no question of riding; and if ever a level came, here would be no head-wind.

I climbed on, with beautiful backward views of the lake, until at last I was out of the ravine, with its sides of steep tillage, and on to open mountain—nothing but brown bog and heather all round. And here the road appeared to cease at a turf

stack where was the usual trio—an old man, a dog, and a "wee ass." Pleasant and kindly the old man was, as I stopped and chatted; but he struck dismay into my heart. It had been seven miles by local information to Bunlin when I left the main road; it was seven miles still according to this new informant, after half-an-hour's hard travelling. Still, he could show me the two peaks of mountain between which Bunlin lay, though he was vague about their names. As to what lay beyond—for the whole western horizon was a range of peaks and ridges—he knew nothing; and of Cushinass, whither I was bound, he had never heard the name. I reflected to myself on the curiously secluded and limited life that the courteous, slow-spoken old man must have led up here in his nook of the hills, ignorant even of market towns across a few barriers of hill; and I decided to try him for Irish folklore. We conversed in Gaelic for a few phrases, till I failed to understand, and I explained my difficulty. "Ay," he said, "it would always be the same for me with the Dutch." "The Dutch?" I asked; "and why would the

Dutch be harder for you than any other language?" "Oh, just the same, sure; but it was still the Dutch I heard them speaking in America; men and women that would be living in the house with me, and not a word I would know on what they said, no more than if it was ducks quacking."

And so my speculations had to be modified. But what a queer experience of existence it must be that is divided between a tenement in Philadelphia and a cottage in this dispeopled district of Donegal! He could not tell me about the contrast though—I doubt his English was scarcely equal to it, even had he been able to set out his impressions—and we parted with the elaborate Gaelic courtesies of leave-taking. The road, or track, continued to be traceable—metal roughly laid down, and much overgrown with rushes; and at last I crested the top and saw the wildest landscape spread out that my eye ever beheld in Donegal: rolling slopes of moor, mountains beyond, and nowhere a trace of tillage nor habitation, nowhere the track of man but this half-effaced roadway; recently laid

out and little used, it had a hard struggle not to relapse into sheer moorland also.

Nevertheless, in half a mile or so it ran down into a regular road concealed among the shoulders of mountain, and I sped quickly along and reached houses. A skiff of rain came up, just as I passed a little shop, and I bethought me to inquire after trains. "She does be due in Bunlin at twelve o'clock, but it bees mostly a quarter after again she's there." I looked at my watch —seven minutes past twelve! "How far is it to Bunlin?" "Three miles—or three and a half."

This was a hopeful hearing. However, the great thing in Ireland is to remember that anything may happen, and I pressed on till my valley debouched on another, and from that other valley issued the little train. I pedalled on steadily, but the expected downhill was by no means unbroken; the wind, after its custom, blew in my face; and soon the train was out of sight. Still I pushed on, thinking that after all there was something to be said for railway time-tables, and ruefully remembering the ten minutes I had laid out in conversation with

my old friend. And still there was no Bunlin, though now I began to see the lake, and trees by the road, a sure sign in these wild places of a town. My mind was made up now that it was useless, and I was busy consoling myself with the thought that I had at least received assurances that in Glen Finn the young generation grows up speaking Irish as well as their elders—a point on which my old friend had been emphatic—when I ran into the town and saw below me railway signals. "Is she gone?" I shouted to a passing boy. "No," he said; and I charged down the hill, expecting every moment to see the train move off. Only when I had nearly impaled a policeman with the projecting point of my rod, did the fact strike me that the engine was detached to water up; and so, without more difficulty, I rejoined the train which had parted from me a good ten minutes earlier; and after this fashion perseverance was rewarded.

I reached Cushinass before two, and bicycled down to the Owengariff river, which enters the sea perhaps a mile from the town; and here, when I began to sort

out my tackle, trouble threatened. I had borrowed a trout reel for the sake of ten extra yards of line on it, and this reel came from my basket in two pieces. Search revealed the screws which a jolting had shaken out; experiment revealed the fact that if properly tightened in, these screws hindered the reel from running. However, I was glad to get it together at any price, and I hurried up to the first big pool.

The Owengariff was not new to me. Five years before I had come to Cushinass meaning only to stay a night, had found the river in flood and borrowed rod and reel. Under the guidance of a local poacher I had fished up, unsuccessfully, for it was early June, and fish were still scarce. But on fishing down, we rose a salmon at last; rose him again and then hooked him—in as safe-looking a place as you could see, at the head of a level pool, fifteen yards across, forty yards long, with no sort of impediments. But the fish of the Owengariff are no sluggards. This brute went heavily down with the hook, then, as he felt it sting, shot straight across the river with a splendid rush. Then, when the bank stopped him,

he turned, and striking a diagonal, straight and swift as an arrow, he dashed towards the tail of the pool where it issued in a raging rapid. Very likely I lost my head, and kept less strain on him than I should, for I have never seen before or since a fish bolt so fiercely. Anyhow it was all over in a flash. I was on the wrong side of a big ditch, and before I had time or wit to jump and run to keep near him, my borrowed line was stripped out to the last of its five-and-thirty yards, and I was holding against the fish for an instant, till my cast parted. And since then I have always thought of the Owengariff as the place where I lost the best fish I ever put fly into.

This year it made me some reparation—though I still owe it grudges. Anyhow, when I reached the big pool, my heart went out to it in gratitude, for salmon showed immediately. The water was dead low, of course, but a curl on the water gave hopes, where fish were so plenty. I put up what we commonly use in Donegal—white trout flies, or indeed lake trout size, with cast to match. In a few moments the gillie whom I had sent for joined me with the cheerful

news that, in this very pool, on the previous day he had killed one fish and risen others. The situation explained itself when I learnt that, just ten days before, the west side of the mountains had come in for a thunderstorm and flood which let the fish up in shoals; so that while we were blaspheming against the drought he had the best of fishing.

That afternoon, however, I could do nothing but fish over what seemed to be likely rises, changing flies and doing all I knew. In one of the intervals a big fish jumped clean out on the far side of the pool and my gillie looked at him ruefully. "What weight would you give him?" he said. "Twenty to five-and-twenty," I said, "and I never expected to see the like of him here." "I was thinking thirty," said Maurice glumly, "and he's there since May. I tried him with fly and I tried him with worm, and I could do nothing with him." I should explain that half a mile or so of the left bank of the Owengariff, comprising four of the best pools, is free fishing, and that my gillie was a professional angler with all the dignity of a license, taken out for the first time this year. It had bred him derision,

for during all of June he killed no fish, and, as he said, "the boys were codding me"; but the flood came at last and he got seven in the week on this bit of water—showing a handsome profit on his sovereign.

A fine fisher he was (as I saw when he took my rod), and the son of a fine old poacher and fly-tier—some of whose flies I commissioned him to bring me. It saddened me to find that all his experience threw doubts on the chance of catching white trout in the tide-pools, and having tried it ineffectually, I went back discouraged to the hotel.

Here I found other anglers, one of whom sallied out with me next morning: on a dark wet day with south-easterly breeze, making a fine ripple. Yet I could stir nothing in the big pool, nor in another fine deep stretch above it, and my mind was to leave the water early and get home in good time. It seemed worth while, however, to try first a lower pool, which Maurice had dismissed as too shallow, and here I rose at once what I took to be a sea-trout. Persevering, I covered the water to the far side, and there at last came—most unexpectedly—

a big swirl. Nothing happened, however, and the fish would not come back; I went down to the stretch below, communing hard with myself, for it was close on the limit of my time, if I was to catch the earlier train from Ballyglen, and the drizzle of rain had wetted me completely and I had no means of changing. Still, I had risen a salmon, for the first time this summer; the day was yet young and had many chances. And then, as I looked back, I saw the back of a fish come out lower down in the same hole, where a slight, hardly perceptible swirl in the water had followed my flies. I went back, fished over the pool carefully, and again on the far side came the heavy rise; and this time my line went down. Jubilantly I raised the point of the rod, the line tightened clear, I saw a white side turn over —and then the flies fell slack. Every one who has fished for salmon knows that feeling.

But the man who has fished for salmon at leisure and with ample opportunity knows little of what the disappointment is to us unfortunates who snatch a hurried chance in a townsman's holiday. I was in Donegal

all of August 1902, and never once straightened the line in what I knew to be a salmon; hardly any one did through the whole county in that month. Now my chance was gone, and when was it going to come back to me? What is more, the experienced and constant angler knows at least whether he is or is not to blame for a mishap of this kind; the less expert are visited with remorses unknown to him. My soul reproached me that I had not struck harder; even with small flies my little trout rod might have needed a sharper snatch to drive home the barb. And again, your veteran has his proceedings reduced to a formula; he knows exactly what to do when a salmon rises. But for the angler whose experience is chiefly with trout, a salmon's rise is full of pitfalls. If you strike at once, as at a trout, you generally lift the fly from his slow jaws, and the result, at least in my case, is a sudden stiffening of the muscles to prevent the normal reaction at the sight of a rise. Consequently, when I do raise my rod, I raise it slow and cautious —as a man does, in short, with a very rare chance. But your angler who hooks, or

rises, salmon every other day through the season is free from these tremors and perplexities—the most real that I know.

Nevertheless, I had risen a salmon, and all but hooked a salmon—evidently one's duty was to stick to it. That fish was gone; but as I fished down the hole, over the other that I saw rising, again there came the slight swirl, and on a second offer, a full rise.

Mr. Lang has somewhere written an admirable ballad about the "Salmo irritans." This was a specimen. The brute of a grilse kept me fishing over him at intervals for, I suppose, an hour, rising every now and then but never taking any of the many flies I offered. At last, thinking to circumvent him, I crossed the river and tried him from the far side, but it was no good. Maurice arrived, angling on his own account, fished over him; still no good. My acquaintance from the hotel came down the river from the upper water, and reported that that also was no good. Then, while Maurice was busy at the big pool from the free bank, I went to the hole above, put my flies in under the holly bush which gives it a name,

and suddenly there was a rush and a race, and at the long last I was into a fish.

I "let a roar out of me" to Maurice, thanking heaven that I was in reach of a gaff, for I myself had only a small landing-net. But the rest of my kit was trout tackle, and though my twelve-foot rod could be trusted, I had doubts as to the little reel. And sure enough, when the fish came in with a run towards me, it was wholly impossible to wind fast enough; the bank was steep behind, and in haste I gathered the line with my hand. That manœuvre is well enough in a boat, or on smooth ground; but this bank was far from smooth, and when the fish started to run back again I discovered that the coils had been shed into a whin bush. Tearing off lumps of the prickly stuff, and running to the farthest point available, I managed to check the rush without disaster; then with a hasty left hand I disentangled the line, and by the time Maurice had reached me I was on level terms again. But the suspense lasted for another while, for though the fish showed small, he was big enough for that rod and tackle; and when at last

Maurice scrambled down to gaff him, he had life enough left to make another race —and the reel stuck. Fortunately I had moved as far up as possible from the bush, and could follow him by the bank, working meanwhile to free the reel; but it was a bad moment. Again I got things clear and drew him to the side under the man's feet; I felt the gaff hit him, but no lightening of the strain; again another shock, and still the fish did not come; and it was only at the third offer that the worst gaff I ever knew went in, and Maurice lifted him on to the bank.

He weighed less than six pounds, but it had been a sporting struggle; and at least I could face the world now.

What was more, the day was evidently making up for heavy rain; a flood was due; and I decided to throw myself on the local resources. We took the fish back, as neither of us could rise another, and my landlord promised me the loan of clothes. After lunch, I started again; again rose my *salmo irritans;* left him and went up stream to the only other serious chance. And here, sure enough, in a fine stream a fish rose;

and again my conscience was uneasy. He touched the fly, ever so lightly; but I could not swear that I had not moved it when he came suddenly.

Thus it will be observed I went home exceedingly wet, happy in having got a fish, but distressed to think that with perfect fishing I might have got another, and perhaps even two more. How many salmon-fishers, I wonder, that same day made very similar reflections!

I also reproached myself not a little with various follies. I had come with trout tackle to a salmon river; I had discarded a trusty little reel and borrowed one in which by this time only two or three pins were left, the rest having tumbled out; I had even departed from my usual practice, which is to slip my gaff-head into my basket on all occasions. Still, a gaff could be made locally, and I added that to the list of necessaries which I must purchase in the town. Next day's post would bring my reel in response to a wire, and I was promised the loan of a salmon rod.

Next morning the Owengariff was reported to be in full flood, and Cushinass

presented the appearance of a carnival. Everywhere people were rushing about with the air of those who hasten to a festival—young and old, big and little, all with rods and tins of worms. I started out along the Donegal road in quest of a small stream which was reported to hold white trout, and was met at once by a grey-bearded signior returning with a big rod and a cast dangling. He told me hurriedly that he had been broken by one that must have weighed ten pounds, and plenty had been caught: salmon, of course, running up the Owenduff, a small river on which Cushinass stands. I went hurriedly along in quest of my stream, for it had stopped raining, and these brooks begin to fall at once. The first water I came to was not encouraging—the Lea river, a narrow flat ditch running through sedge; deep enough, and I daresay holding fish, as was reported, but on that day dead calm. A hole where the bridge made a swirl yielded nothing, so I pushed on to the next ravine in the hills, where it was evident there must be swift water; and presently the roar of the Brockey was grateful to my ears. I crossed

it by a bridge, and in my zeal walked up another mile so as to be sure and reach the head of the water; but the stretch which looked right enough from the road proved to be nothing but a series of shallows, and for a full half-hour I could not find a hole which seemed likely to hold fish of any size. At last, only a hundred yards above the bridge where I first struck the stream, the river narrowed below a series of rapids, and then spread suddenly, making a fine pool overhung by a big sycamore. Carefully I put my line on it—not now the elegant small tackle that I had used for grilse the day before, but good lumps of flies tied by my friend Dan, such as had done execution in the Tuirseachawn. And in a moment, as they reached the middle of the run, came a great wallowing rise and a heavy side showed itself, then plunged. Back and forward the fish fought me, I holding him pretty strong, for the tree on my left spelt ruin if he got far below it; but at the last he grew spent, and again my difficulties began with the small net. Where I was bound to bring him was slack water, and I could not hold his nose to the

stream; so that whenever I made a well-planned attempt to bring the net's mouth up behind his tail, he fled from me. At last, getting it under him, I saw gleefully his head go down; he had dived right in, and I lifted him to the bank, no light burden on the well-worn meshes. Just as pretty a fish as you could see, he was, well filled out in every way, and white as silver; and I would never wish for a better foundation to a basket.

I tried a run below, and then another, and then came to an elbow in the stream where expectation was high, and not disappointed. The same heavy rise, the same succession of sharp tugs on the line—so unlike a salmon's measured rush or drag—and I was sure I had my brace. But alas for confidence! With lighter tackle I should probably have succeeded; but with salmon gut and large flies even on a trout rod one is prone to take liberties with a trout. Again I had a tree on my left, and below that a succession of rapids. I could easily have turned the obstacle by stepping in, for this tree was small and easy to be circumvented; and the rapids could have

been managed. But I knew the tackle would hold him, and I forgot to remember that of all fish a fresh-run white trout has the softest mouth. And so when he turned his side to the current and wallowed there—another good two-pounder—I held, and the gut held, but the grip on the fish parted and I was left lamenting.

And within ten minutes I was as wet as if I had gone in after him. For I was now convinced I was in for a repetition of the day with Dan Keary, and when, about a hundred yards down the plantation, I reached a pool obviously better than any I had yet come to, which could only be fished by wading, of course I waded. And in it, to my blank astonishment, I rose nothing.

When I had crossed at a ford below, the matter was explained; for from the other bank part of it could be fished, and the grass there was padded hard. The wormer had been busy. And as I went down I saw everywhere similar tracks and could rise nothing. I fished down nearly to the sea; then, for the day had brightened, and the water was running down, I tried a smaller cast — the same as I had fished the day

before for salmon; and going up in one pool where I was confident fish must be, I gave them a good trial, and was rewarded by a rush and a leap which showed me a white trout little more than half the size of the others. But, small as he was, he was determined enough in all conscience; and when he took me racing *up stream*—the line cutting swiftly into a sharp rapid—a workman from the field above came hastening down, only in time to see me work down and land —not, as he had supposed, a salmon, but a fish very little over the pound.

I regretted the lost one, of course. But the day was still young and the rage for experiment was on me. I was convinced the Owenduff would fish at once; I thought it likely the Owengariff would be in order before night, and I was loath to miss the chance of salmon. Partly also I was moved with compassion for a lady and gentleman, fellow-guests at the hotel, who were patiently fishing with worm the little flat ditch near the tideway, and, as I expected, catching nothing but an eel or two, and one flounder! I commended the Brockey to them and started for the Owenduff; but on

my way the thought struck me that I might make something of the upper waters of the same little ditch. To reach the place where it came down from a ravine I crossed many fields and awkward hedges only to find that the water was hopelessly small (though I daresay perseverance would have revealed some good pools), and that the day had grown exceeding hot and sultry.

I returned to the hotel to hear from the man who had gone to the Owengariff that it was still in thick flood, and that a number of grilse had been got with the worm. I was, however, so confident that on this day the fly would kill wherever there was good water that I laboured a mile or more up the Owenduff and came on the likeliest of pools. But, fish as I might, I could stir nothing, and returned tired and hot to the hotel.

Still, there was a chance before me, and after a cup of tea I tramped to the free water on the Owengariff. Here, before I reached the big pool, a perfect cataract of rain came on me and drenched me to the very skin. When I reached the bank, I found fishers in a row on the bank worming, and Maurice, rueful and indignant, casting

a fly. His own garden was unfruitful of worms, and worms that day were worth money in Cushinass. He had come down late and the big fishing had been in the very early hours; about eighteen or twenty grilse had been taken out of the river—all the harder to bear because not one of the fishers but himself had a license, and the water-keeper, on other days active enough, had chosen this time to take to his bed. As I looked at the row of hardy and determined sportsmen, I thought the water-keeper had shown prudence.

Still, Maurice had got a grilse, and a couple of white trout; but the true tragedy was yet to be told. He had hooked the big fish; and the creature had (very naturally) run across the hole which, at its widest, must be some fifty yards; and Maurice, with the astounding carelessness of country anglers, had about thirty yards of line. The result was natural: a snap of the gut, and poor Maurice was, as they said, "in very bad twist" for the rest of the while that flood lasted.

By this time, however, the worm had grown quite ineffective, and I tried the fly

over the water in which the lines were dangling, and for an instant I had hope, for a salmon came to the top so that his white side gleamed yellow through the discoloured water. I would have given a deal to catch him there and then. It would have been even better than the moment when, going up the Brockey, I met a man worming, learnt he had got nothing, and brutally waved my two fine fish at him across the stream. But it was not to be. Neither Maurice nor I could stir a fish to the fly that evening.

Nevertheless, on the whole I returned to my hotel fairly content. I had expected nothing from the day, and I had come in for a really good hour of what may be called natural fishing. The Brockey was free to whoever liked to fish it; I pioneered the water for myself, picked my own flies, landed my own fish, and got a couple of trout which I would as soon have any day as a small salmon. If my bag had weighed over five pounds, as it should have done, instead of three and a half, as it did actually, I should have been quite happy; and anyhow I had added materially to my

knowledge of the fishing possibilities of Donegal.

Unfortunately for my peace of mind I was beguiled next day into a most unprofitable lapse. That night it rained again in torrents, and the Owengariff was bound to be up again in flood. There was nothing to stop me from fishing the Brockey again; or, if I chose, from going up to the head-waters of the Owenduff, and working my way down: the last is what I wish I had done. But my landlord told me how his young brother had that morning hooked (and lost) five salmon before breakfast with the worm; and it seemed only wise and profitable to learn the business. So it seemed also to the pleasant soldier who was fishing from the same hotel, and accordingly next morning we set out together for our reserved side of the river—with a huge and slimy tinful of bait.

Arrived at the bank, we saw again the same array of anglers, but this day the fishing had been less prosperous. They had one grilse among them, and Maurice claimed it for his. We had made observations concerning the absence of water-bailiffs, and

accordingly to-day we had not gone far before we were confronted by one who demanded our licenses. We spoke our minds to him, and he expostulated. These people had a right to fish on the free bank, and the worm was a bait for trout. But we told him—what of course he did not need to be told—that the Owengariff was barren of brown trout, and that any man seen taking white trout or salmon from it would be liable to a fine; and that if he chose to sit upon the point of vantage where they were fishing—incomparably the best place in the river—at least not one fish in five of those actually caught would have been taken.

Our point was emphasised a little farther up. While we still waited we were joined by a little person who announced himself as sent from the hotel to instruct us, as he was well known to be a great worm fisher. A dissolute-looking little creature he was, with a red inflamed eye; a mechanic obviously, not a countryman. That he was expert and enthusiastic could not be doubted when we saw the joy with which he set to impaling the bait in wriggling loops and bunches.

"There," he said, holding up the writhing mass, "there's as pretty a worm as any man could see."

However, when we reached the desired point—a sort of corner of refuge between two heavy series of rapids where the fish run in to rest—there was already one angler on the ground. He had no right to be there, but he stayed, and we angled peaceably beside him. And we learnt from our attendant—who interchanged hurried undertones in Gaelic—that he had hooked at least one fish, but had been obliged to let him break loose because of the untimely arrival of a keeper. After a little he moved off, but for all we could do he might as well have stayed; and I took little pleasure in the business of lumping in the bunch and letting it drift slowly down along the bottom—catching every other moment in a rock. But if it was poor sport for us, the expert thoroughly enjoyed it, and was continually anxious to get from me the rod with which he saw me so unhandy. And at last, when we had moved up to a spot near the head of our water, where again was another resting-place for fish, his excitement got beyond

bounds. Heartily sick of it I gave him the rod after trying the lie, and while he fished, a salmon's back showed as the fish fought out of the rush of water. With wild eyes my gillie pitched the worm over it, standing out on a most insecure little bough of scrub oak to reach the better. I saw the line check, move a little, and the sportsman hurried in with stealthy movements from his perch; then the line cut the water, and as the fish crossed into the current and was caught in the surging rush at the head of the rapid, it tightened—and came away slack. The hold had not been made good.

Words cannot describe the fever of that little man as he commented on the situation. "There, now, didn't I tell you I would hook one? It was no fault of mine. I wouldn't check him till I was sure he had it swallowed. Didn't you see me following him?" It was all very fine, but we had not hooked the fish; and though he set to work with trembling hands to impale other wriggling bunches, I soon came away, and we tried our luck again at the lower station. Here at last my angler, as he fished, told me there was a fish on. I took the rod and

felt, sure enough, one slight tug, then another, and presently the line moved up stream, and I tightened. I was into him right enough—a fine capture—one of the smaller run of white trout weighing perhaps half a pound. What finished me was the gillie's method of despatching it. Having dragged the worms and hook from its throat, he seized the fish, as I supposed, to knock it on a stone; but not he! Catching the head in his front teeth, he gave it a sharp bite. These are the manners of worm fishers. I went off the river shortly after, sick of the whole business, as, except for this and one or two insignificant brown trout, neither of our rods had caught anything. Nor were the fishers on the far bank doing any better, and our gillie said—ignorant that we were to believe him!—that it would not fish that day with a fly.

At all events we were sick to death of it, and the Owenduff was bound to be in lovely order. So it was, and we fished pool after pool in the highest hopes; but, except for one brute of a grilse that rose three times and never touched the fly, we saw nothing, and went home disgusted and dis-

consolate. I infer that, at least in the lower reaches of the Owenduff, fishing cannot be of much account. For on that same day, about six miles up the Owengariff—better water, of course, than the lower stretch—one angler, accompanied by Maurice's father, killed ten fish. On the Gweedore river another man did the same; and a second rod got eight. Most of them, if not all, were taken with the fly. And we, if only we had been better inspired and directed, might certainly have hooked several salmon on the Owengariff between us. We lost that afternoon the chance of the season!

For next day the flood was down, and the river in almost perfect order for the fly; but as we walked down, everything was looking a deal too pretty — lucent air, a hint of sun, and the whole atmosphere tremulous and palpitating. The great mountain mass towards Glen Columbkille was wet with colour; the sandhills towards Douros shone. Better for us had been a grey huddle of clouds, and a strong wind out of the west; for the big pool, where we divided the fishing, was windless, and except for the stream at the head of it,

offered no ghost of a chance. Still, here in all conscience the chance looked good enough, and fish were moving in all directions. But for all I could do not one would rise, and presently a professional angler of repute came down the free side reporting that he could stir nothing. I tried down to the tideway, but to no purpose, and was none the happier on returning when I saw across the river Maurice going off with a small grilse from a pool I had fished repeatedly. Quick on his bare feet, he had probably been down at sunrise, fished the water over, then back home to work; now he had slipped out again, and when I saw him was disappearing homewards to dispose of his capture.

At lunch-time when we met and exchanged beats, the other man on our side had been no luckier: not a single rise had come the way of either of us.

As I fished up, Maurice again appeared on the far bank fishing conscientiously the pool on which I had designs; and since it could be covered with ease from bank to bank, I decided to move up to the reach of river which was left to us untouched by

the professionals. But as we passed we exchanged greetings, and it was then I learnt our mischance. "What took you off the river yesterday? I got two with the fly and rose cartloads," he shouted contemptuously to my little follower, whom I had retained because of his keenness,—Maurice himself very naturally preferring his chances as an angler to his limited certainty as a gillie. Further inquiry elicited the fact that he had lost several fish besides those he killed. We, with the longer beat of water, were simply bound to have had sport if we had stayed, and it made me sick to think of the fool I had been.

Anyhow we went up, fishing glumly till we came to the place where the Owengariff in flood—or even out of it—is the wildest-looking water I know. You go up past rapid after rapid to a point where the right bank—on which we were—projects a shoulder, and here the river is perhaps thirty yards wide. But above this the bed spreads, and in the middle of it, still on a steep slope, an island rises, making a large pool near our bank, into which the water tears down through gaps four or five feet

wide between enormous boulders that even in high flood stand up a yard above the torrent. Beyond the island is a wider rapid studded with the same boulders, and the whole scene of tumultuous brown water tearing down through these tremendous rocks is just as savage a prospect as you could behold. A fierce river it is, and wide-spread, for from bank to bank must be far out of gunshot.

At the head of this cheerful place is a pool or stretch of deep rapid water, obviously fishable in flood; and here I was fishing with mighty little hope but conscientious execution, when suddenly came a tear at my line, and the face of nature changed, as it does when you hook a salmon.

Stumbling along a very rocky bank I endeavoured to keep abreast of him, when suddenly the line became fixed in mid-stream, and my gillie shouted, "He'll be under a rock; this is the worst hole in the river for them." Nothing budged for half a minute or so—a long time when you do not know if you are or are not fast in a salmon—and I became convinced that the fish was off, and my second fly fast in some

crevice; for, according to the suicidal custom of the country, I was fishing with two. But as I moved down stream to try and free the hold, suddenly the reel began to scream and the line ran—ran like fury—yet all the while entering the water at the same spot; and in an instant the fish leapt a good fifteen yards up stream from the point where the line emerged. The situation was clear. The brute had dashed back to the rock from under which he came to my fly; then, heading up stream, had got the line clean round the rock, and my tackle was rubbing against heaven only knew what edges. I dashed down to the tail of the pool so as at least to lessen the angle at which he pulled on the tackle; and as I began to alter the strain, he came swiftly back, giving me all I could do to reel in. But here was the trouble. I had brought him clear, only to find him hovering over the point where the pool emptied itself into the mad race of the rapids.

Still, I reflected that any fish which had just come up those torrents and ledges would be in no hurry to go down again, and for a while he refrained. But if he did, the first

manœuvre was repeated; again the line became stationary, again I felt rock grating against it, again I had to get below him and pull with the stream. The inevitable happened: he swung a moment broadside to the race of water, the strain grew too heavy, and I had to let him go.

The first stream, of reasonable width, took him into a smaller basin above the island where the river divided, and here he circled for a moment, then moved obdurately to the far side. If he went down there, he was gone for good; it would be impossible either to hold him or to reach him once the island came between us. So with a heavy hand I steered him back to our side, but out of this side the rapid went in a series of short falls, from a foot to two feet high. Down these he went, for there was no holding him against that rush of water; and at each swirling hole there was just room for him to give a lash or two with his tail that carried him again into the stream. There were still four or five of these stages to pass before the big pool was reached; but midway I descried a small basin with an eddy, and getting close up, as he slipped down into

it with the fall, I turned his head to the backward swirl and he came heavily towards our bank,—hitherto having always chosen a track that was divided from us by a yard or two of mill-race between slippery rocks.

Here at last I was able to control his movements, and here for the first time he turned on his side, within reach, as it seemed, of the gaff. But my gillie was for taking no risks, and once more the fish sheered off towards the outlet, and once more I brought him back ; the gaff was slipped into him as he turned, and he came down with a thud on the bank. It had been a mighty near thing. The shock of landing him and his first struggles on the ground broke the link of the gut, and he lay there free of the line.

A beautiful fish he was — only nine pounds, but absolutely fresh run, as the sea-lice were there to testify — pointed in the head, deep in the shoulder, hardly longer than my five-pounder of the day before. I have never killed a heavy fish, but I should never expect such sport from a twenty-pounder in slack water as I had in the few minutes' wild excitement while we contended

with this active and cunning creature. And I forgave my little gillie his uncouthness and his savagery for the way in which he entered into the spirit of the game. He recalled every word of advice he had given me during the performance—little of which I had heard—and dilated upon the manner in which he had gaffed him. "I would rather that nor five white shillings now," he cried, and certainly I think that he would not have missed it for a good deal. Neither would I. Five times out of six, I should say, one would lose a fish hooked in that spot during flood-water; and my heartfelt tribute is due to Mr. Courtney of Killarney, who made both the fly and the cast (single gut) that went through such rough usage. The hook—a No. 5—though still fit to fish, was perceptibly straightened out; and I am inclined to treasure it as a memento of the most exciting run a fish ever gave me.

That was the end of my tether at Cushinass, for I had gone for one night and stayed four, and so heavy a thundercloud had come up that it seemed clear the day would not be good for much now. I fished the rest of the beat without turning a tail, then set out

for the hotel, having to ride five miles to Ballyglen, and then accomplish a very heavy twelve over the mountain from Bunlin.

It was not exactly easy. I had indeed borrowed largely: clothes for the evening from my landlord; my soldier friend also provided me with a mackintosh, which this day nearly came to a bad end; for as we stood taking by the big pool, a hungry mountain heifer passed where it lay, seized it, and then luckily we saw her. She bolted with it in her mouth like a dog with a bone, but soon dropped it none the worse; had she got a clear two minutes it would have been chewed at least, if not digested. The flavour allured her, for she prowled round as long as we were on the pool, and had repeatedly to be driven off. These borrowed plumes I could discard; but in addition to my original kit, I was now possessed of a large pair of boots, sundry flannel garments, a salmon reel — and a salmon. To stow these into a bicycle-bag and fishing-basket and fix them as well as my rod and net on to a bicycle was rather a problem, and the end of it was that the salmon, neatly swathed in straw, had to be

slung across my shoulders. Thus equipped, I started ; and, given time, it is wonderful what a lot a cycle can be made to carry. But all the same, when I reached the top of the hill above Bunlin I had done enough shoving. I got on the machine, determined that, rough or smooth, over stones or rushes, it had to carry me, and it did carry me till I got to the bottom. There were anxious moments in that descent, yet not so anxious but that I could enjoy the first sight of Lough Columb, a grey sheet of island-studded water lying among the hills far below me with windings like an arm of the sea. And even if the strap galled my shoulders, I was in no humour to complain when I reached the hotel about nine o'clock, bearing my sheaves with me.

That is what a person like myself may call, on the whole, a fairly successful expedition. I had gone off expecting at best a few white trout. I had killed a couple of salmon, and a good brace of white trout into the bargain. And, what is more important, all the time, except when I was worming, I had been fishing with expectation maintained by the frequent sight of fish. The

Owenduff was an exception; and yet I was glad to explore the Owenduff. I have seldom in four days added so much to my knowledge of available waters. And as far as luck went, much more of it had come to me than to my fellow-guests at the inn.

But, *per contra*, in the same days Maurice Airlie, with less water to fish, had killed one fish with the worm and four with the fly, for before I left the Owengariff he had got a second—a twelve-pounder, moreover. Admitting his superior skill and knowledge, he would not have been so far ahead of us, had we stayed on the Thursday afternoon, when with luck one might easily have got two or three fish.

The moral of this is that, on a river which you do not know by heart, it is worth paying high to get a really good gillie. Still, we ought to have known better. The fly had been no good on the previous day with similar water, but then there had been a deluge impending. And I may say for myself that nothing but sheer disgust with the beastly business of worming would have taken me off a flood-river that was falling.

These are the things that cannot happen

to the man who really fishes constantly, and, in fact, knows the business. The occasional angler, like myself, is liable to endless errors, and not for him are the days of six or eight fish. He may think himself very lucky, as I did, with a couple of fish inside the week—more especially if he has had minor items in the way of trout to fill up with, and above all, a good sprinkling of rises to maintain the interest.

VIII

A DAY WITH WHITE TROUT

FISHING is not all disappointments, and at least one day this summer turned out well beyond my expectations. The Owenmore, of all rivers the most familiar to me, differs from most salmon waters in this, that it contains a single stretch of splendid fishing, whereas over the rest of it the man does fairly well who gets two or three fish in a week. This stretch consists of the first half-mile above the tideway at Aghnish, and it is bounded by a carry of most unreasonable height and difficulty. Fish come in from the sea very early—in old days it was a common thing for the squire, who owns the fishery, to present his neighbours with a fresh-run salmon for Christmas; but either they cannot or they will not face the laborious passage of this waterfall early in

the year. And since the actual fishing water is little more than two hundred yards long, they gather in it wonderfully thick. The fishing is limited to two rods, one reserved by the owner, the other is let under rather exceptional conditions; and this year the lessee had killed, by the beginning of June, ninety-nine salmon—averaging, probably, over ten pounds. He stayed a week, I was told, trying to get the hundredth, but gave it up. As it was, he had broken all records. The year before he had also caught the largest single fish ever heard of there—a salmon of thirty-three pounds, and he hooked him on a trout rod and light tackle. The village was mostly gathered on the bank before the long business of killing that fish was ended, and the tale bids fair to become epic.

All this, however, relates to spring fishing, and from June onwards the reserved water is of no special virtue for salmon, for the fish run up freely—though it is no doubt always the best chance. But for white trout it is excellent, and these fish seem hardly to pass the first fall. As a boy I had caught a score in the day on the

lower water, but above the big carry only a very few in each season. And accordingly this year, when I begged a day on what is called "the pool," it was for white trout that I proposed to fish.

The water consists of the pool itself, a long, flat, deep stretch with a mill-race at the head, and banked up by a low carry at the bottom. In this probably four-fifths of the salmon are caught. Below are two throws. Where the water comes over the carry, part runs in a bold stream down the right bank to the farther side of an island; part turns to the left bank (off which the fishing is always done) and forms a deep hole above the salmon-weir and the King's Gap. Below this is a rapid shallow stretch; below that again a disused eel-weir, where the confined stream makes a deep hole with a fine run, which looks a fine natural lie for salmon, but is of no repute for them; they are indeed hardly taken below the weir. But all this lower stretch into which the tide penetrates is the white-trout angler's happy hunting-ground, and here at once I began to fish.

I had turned up early, and sought in-

formation from a friend who lives on the bank. He recommended trout flies of the smallest kind, for the water was dead low and the day inclined to brightness; and some days before, with heavier water, he had been constrained to use tackle of this kind. I followed his advice, putting up two flies—for the bob a hare's ear, tied, as hare's ears should be, with a good bunch of fur and broad stripes of tinsel; and for the tail, my chief dependence, the blue and silver fly which has killed more white trout for me than all other flies put together.

Nor did it fail me now. I began at the hole under the eel-weir, and rises came at once—rises plentier than takes, for the water was so clear that I could see the fish come up toward the fly, even as it travelled a long way off. But I soon had half-a-dozen on the bank, averaging half-a-pound or so; and my hands were covered with silvery scales, for the fish were all newly run; and not only that, but a faint odour of brine was about me and about the net, as if I had been handling some delicate kind of herrings. I never noticed this before, and I have never been conscious of it with larger trout even

when they were covered with sea-lice. But these little "gormans" (or "blueings," to make an English word) were fragrant of the sea.

Having fished this hole and the shallow runs below it sufficiently, I went up to the salmon water, where also I got others, still small. But the pool itself was windless; so was the "cave-hole" above the weir; and in the big run under the carry nothing would move. In the long pool, however, salmon were moving so much that I decided to try the trout flies over them, and though I got none, I got some white trout, and at last, just before lunch-time, one well clear of a pound. When I went in I had about a dozen and a half, and had greatly enjoyed myself.

For, needless to say, though the fish were small, every one of them had fought harder than many a big slug of a brown trout, dancing into the air again and again. And when I took the rod out after lunch on to the shallow rapid between salmon-weir and eel-weir, there came half an hour of the fastest fishing I have ever seen. From one single little break behind a small rock I

took out four lively fish one after the other, hauling each clear of the lie and down stream as I hooked him. It was not absolutely easy either, for the cast had to be made fine and from a good distance, or nothing would take, though they would swirl up and look at the fly.

By the time I reached the eel-weir again I had turned my two dozen, and, what was very gratifying, had scarcely lost a fish or pricked one. Then, however, luck changed. My companion since lunch left me to go off to tennis, and just after he left I hooked a fish which bolted far down the stream, where I did not want to follow, as my friend departing had laid the net down above me. I turned him satisfactorily, got him back into the hole, and had a glimpse of a fish somewhere over the pound—when suddenly and causelessly the hook came out. With that my prosperity departed.

I could do nothing right. Fish rose at me, and I pricked instead of hooking them. A new fly which I put up—for by this time two or three of the blue and silvers had been chewed to pieces—slipped the

knot. Another fly broke in a heavy fish which rose at me in still water on the pool; and finally, one of the water-keepers came up, and when I did hook a trout lost the fish trying to land him. At last I decided to go in and give the water a rest and order my car, for I had to depart early; and I did so less reluctantly, being persuaded the fishing was over.

Still, my mind was not clear about the big run below the carry, for I had risen nothing there; and I determined before I departed to try it with a bigger fly. Accordingly I put up a lemon-grey, lake-trout size, but such as had killed me fish on the Owengariff, and with it fished the stream. And just when I reached the point where the sharp arch of the stream's waves subsided into a smooth undulation, and I was thinking "Here or nowhere," and making my best efforts to cover the whole current—a long cast for a trout rod—there came a noble swirl, and a fish of the larger size rose, took, and made a splendid run. Lucky for me that I had gone a-borrowing and had eighty yards of line, light but trustworthy, on the smooth-running Nottingham reel!

When he came to my side, however, and began to run again, down stream, my heart sank; he was heading for the King's Gap, and with my tackle I could do no more than discourage him. It was enough, however; and presently I saw, and rejoiced to see, that he was no salmon, only a white trout—rejoiced, because by the rules of this water you keep your trout but give in your salmon! Presently I got him, and mighty fine he looked on the bank: a fish very close indeed on three pounds. And as I worked on down stream I caught another small one, and yet others, down to the wonderful pool under the eel-weir where I had already taken a good dozen, and they seemed as thick as ever. And here again a big one stirred at me. I could see the stone under which he lay fifteen yards off, so clear was the water; I could even discern him as he followed the fly. Had I only had two hours more to fish till dusk I would have hooked that fish, and others, and made something like a basket! But as it was, my score was over thirty fish weighing just on twelve pounds—nothing wonderful, but it represented a deal of enjoyment, and for a

day's fishing without wind, and with very low water, and a deal of sunshine, it was none too bad. There is more glory in catching one spring fish which outweighs the lot put together; but there is not half so good fun for a day's fishing.

My holidays should be spent always, if I could compass it, near a stream where white trout abound. There is to my mind no fish so game to play, so pleasant to fish for, or so delicate to eat. Let not the last be forgotten. One day this summer at Crishvally, trying a brown flood desperately with huge flies for salmon, I hooked a half-pound white trout, and drew him ashore like a sprat with contempt. But next morning, when feasting luxuriously off new-laid eggs and the trout in question, my solitary and despised capture of the evening before assumed a very different importance in my eyes. For breakfast, give me a trout not exceeding three-quarters of a pound; a pound fish merely tempts to excess, and your two or three pounder is better reserved for the dinner-table, where I aver without hesitation that he excels even your fresh-run salmon. As

for the red fish that has lain three months rusting in the pools, till a countryman spears or nooses him and sells him furtively to the local hotel-keeper — do not let such a creature be mentioned in comparison.

IX

THE YOUNG FISHER

THERE is no variety of sportsman who gets so much joy for so little slaughter as the juvenile angler. I have seen a small boy, at the end of six weeks' pertinacious fishing, exultant over his total of a hundred trout. But of these at least two-thirds went back to the stream, for he had been properly educated, and scorned to take undersized fish. Nothing under two ounces would satisfy his standard. But whether he kept them or not, the capture of each individual pinkeen was a triumph, and he would come in deploring, with a fine mastery of technicalities, that the salmon fry were rising very short. Doubtless in a few years he will be deploring, with equal earnestness, the same perverse behaviour in the adult salmon, and doubtless, in the light of pure reason, he is

no more ridiculous now than he will be then.

Yet, although it will not then be quite so exhilarating to command the terms of art, to call flies by their proper names, and know the virtues of an orange-grouse or a blue-bottle, still the spirit of the thing will be the same, for love of detailed discussion is one of the angler's chief characteristics. In the juvenile sportsman it figures with that touch of extravagance which makes the essence of caricature. Scales are already his delight, and, if the cook permits, he will weigh meticulously every single fish in a basket of two dozen, and will strain his arithmetic to construct averages—sometimes with surprising results; but, after all, how little unlike his instructors!

Naturally, the pursuit is fertile in material for those questions which form the staple of boys' conversation with their elders. There is no limit to the series of interrogations and hypothetical cases. "Which do you think would pull hardest, a white trout of four ounces or a brown trout of six?" If only on this account—but indeed by no means only on this account—it must be allowed

that the young fisher tends to be a nuisance. But if he were not a nuisance in that way, he undoubtedly would be in some other; and in the meanwhile he is acquiring the great virtue of patience, and some little dexterity of hand, constantly needed to disentangle his own casting lines, which every young fisher should be not only encouraged but constrained to do. Moreover, he hardens his constitution by defying wind and weather, and learns a fine disdain for mere meals, contemning even tea and cake while fish are rising, and frequently when they are not.

Those who cannot sympathise with such delights are not merely the uninitiated; they are the invincibly ignorant. But nearly every angler can look back on these hours of easily earned excitement; and one may be sorry for those who do not begin young, and consequently never know them. They may become just as expert; the best fisherman I know never fished till after he was married; but he has missed something that all his big days can never make up for.

I remember well the first fish I ever caught, partly because of the emotion, partly

for the chastisement that followed. We were exploring along the rocks near the mouth of Lough Swilly, when in a cleft between them we espied certain small dark creatures—young pollock, or, as the local name is, *sheein*. Whether we had a rod, or whether a line was tied to the end of a walking-stick, I forget; but I was set to fish in the clear water, and presently a *sheein* took the bait—a small piece of mussel—and I hauled it into mid-air. But it dangled out of reach, for in my excitement I could not think how to hold my rod so that the line would fall beside me; and in stretching after it I toppled over, and, having been lugged out ignominiously, was soundly cuffed for my clumsiness.

I caught other *sheeins* there, and in later holidays captured dozens at Portstewart, fishing from a house in which, I believe, the defender of Ladysmith was born. About the same time began my days of fly-fishing, also under the tutelage of uncles; they continued unaided, and by the time I was sixteen or so I must have been tolerably expert, as I remember twice getting over four dozen fair-sized fish in the river which I call the

Owenmore. My first salmon dates, I think, from about that age, and I know there was trouble when I got him, for I had no license, and this was the second fish killed on trout flies from our house within the week. One of my schoolmasters, a very old friend and an expert salmon-angler, assisted at the performance, and between us we walked the fish up on to a shallow, shoving it with our feet. It was a great moment, perhaps the greater since it came to a boy; but I have often heard boatmen and gillies tell me how gold has been heaped on them by elderly men whose first salmon they have gaffed.

It will be seen that I began fairly early, but my chances were poor compared with those of a boy of my acquaintance whose father lives beside the best pool on that same river, and is perhaps the best fisherman who ever fished it. One day in spring the father was out on this pool, fishing it from a boat, and the rod lay in the stern with the line shortened. The youngster with him picked it up and began to cast; then came a quiet, deep rise, and the fly was taken—apparently by a trout. But in a moment there was a big rush and the reel screamed. The boat-

man implored the father to take the rod, but he insisted that as the boy had hooked the fish he should kill him—if he could. And so the infant angler, about ten years old, was landed on the bank, and, with the butt of the big rod stuck well in his stomach, proceeded to fight the fish and finally to beat him. The salmon weighed seventeen pounds.

A boy so entered on the sport naturally sticks to it, and this year, when I went to fish the pool in question, I found this young gentleman just returned for his summer holidays. He had not yet had his chance there; but at Easter he had killed five salmon in a week, one on the free water; and probably, with a trout rod at least, he is as good as most of us. There is no sport in which complete proficiency can be attained earlier. I once went to fish at Ballina, and to my disgust found the river yellow with mud; big flies were of no avail, and I was driven to try the spoon, of which I had no experience. After half-an-hour's unprofitable loss of time and temper, I asked Jim Hearne's gossoon, who was poling the cot, if he understood the business. He modestly said he thought so;

and in a minute this youngster, whose head would hardly reach my belt, was casting the spoon in a way that I could not manage under six weeks' practice.

But the young fishermen with whose experiences I am most recently familiar have not aspired to salmon, nor did I see them catch their first fish, which were mackerel and pollock, at Looe. I saw plenty, however, of their early efforts and the awful rivalries engendered, and I shall never to my dying hour forget the last of that fishing.

We were departing next day, and a final carnival of fishing was promised. It was ascertained by this time that the most profitable sport was not trolling for mackerel and pollock, but fishing about sundown from an anchored boat for the tiny bream, which are there called chad—with the off-chance of a small conger to make a fearful joy.

Three little boys were rowed out by an old man in his punt, and I followed in a skiff, sculling two little girls (one hardly more than a baby) and their nursery governess. The evening was dead calm, but it had blown strong, and off the river mouth we ran into a swell that made me wish devoutly that we

were in a less crank vessel. However, we moored safely to one of the pilchard boats that lay at anchor, and began the fishing. That is to say, I began to chop a pilchard into small but disgusting pieces for bait.

I had realised by this that chad were much more easily caught with trout hooks and small baits than with the larger tackle used by the local fishers; and I put two hooks on each of those lines, for there was competition between the boats. Almost immediately fish began to take, sometimes one, sometimes two at a time; sometimes also the fishers would feel bites and haul in the line, only to find the bait gone. The smallest girl was barely able to pull in her own line, and none of the three fishers was able to keep the line, when hauled, from tangling; and I promise you their boatman was kept busy, slashing venomously at the bait, disentangling lines, unhooking the fish, which had back fins sharp as a perch's, and generally keeping an eye that no one went overboard. It was brisk sport, and the boat began to fill with the short, deep little fish, olive-brown, olive-green, olive-silvery; but, where she lay riding by the painter, the swell

took her, and she pitched more than a little, and in a few moments the governess leaned over the side. I was for putting her ashore at once, but the little girls protested, more particularly the youngest, her special nursling, and the devoted woman stayed on. Yet it was not all self-sacrifice; the sporting spirit was strong in her, and she continued simultaneously to catch fish and be seasick, till at last night fell dark, the fish stopped biting, and we pulled in gingerly over the smooth, heavy swell where the river met the tide, and past the pier-head to the landing-place. I do not remember how many fish we had aboard—dozens anyhow—but the little girls had defeated their brothers, and were proud in proportion; and the heroic governess revived her drooping body in the exultation of this triumph.

It was a year later that education progressed another step, and the enthusiasts were taught to fish with the fly. Two youngsters accompanied a rather nervous parent to the little hotel at Lough Columb in Donegal; but there was no need for nervousness, as the whole establishment was even more eager to look after them than

after the guests of a less troublesome age. We got out on Lough-na-Mrack next day, under the charge of its best boatman, sometime a member of the constabulary. By his petitions, and against my better judgment, I was induced to rig the second cast, like my own, with three flies. I stipulated, however, that he should keep it in order.

The day was good, and it was not long before they saw that trout could be caught with a fly; but it was long enough before they caught one. One would not believe how many things can be done wrong with a trout line, even casting down the wind. First the flies would tangle round the rod; then when they were got into the water they remained stationary and sank; when this was altered, they were dragged through and whipped up again, to sing round the ears of every one in the boat, where we sat with coat collar turned up and hats pulled down. And when, in spite of all, trout rose at the fly, the learners could not be induced to strike; when at last they did strike, it was with a vehemence fatal to tackle. The day must have been pretty well on when at last one trout rose to a trailing fly near the boat,

and persisted in taking it. Then one began to see how complicated in reality is the process of keeping an even strain on a small fish —difficult as eating with a knife and fork, or any other elaborate accomplishment. But at last the fish came in, and the boatman was for insisting that I should land it. He said (in all seriousness) he would not like to take so great a responsibility. However, at last the fish was landed, and others were got the same day—chiefly by trolling behind the boat, which presents fewer difficulties.

It is certainly a good thing for the young to learn to fly-fish ; nothing affords so excellent a discipline for the temper of their elders. The ex-policeman set me an example not to be forgotten, for though his face spoke of a hot temper (which is no longer a matter of conjecture to me), he unravelled and disentangled with a tireless patience ; and it was pure joy to him when a small boy, having hooked a trout, reeled in desperately almost to the very gut, then, raising the point of his rod, jerked the fish out, while it swung back and forward, evading his hand—generally to drop off into the water, unless the landing-net succeeded in

intercepting it, as you might say, on the wing.

Nevertheless, in three or four days a considerable number of fish were caught, and sent off to admiring relatives. Next year Lough Drummond gave lessons mainly in perseverance, but there were compensations in the cottage where we stayed—its clay floor, its soda bread, its dogs, hens, ducks, calves, and live stock generally. But this last summer the return to Lough-na-Mrack was an event, and the ex-policeman was an old friend, and one who made us welcome. The rest of the party arrived a day before the schoolboys, and the little girls had each caught their fish, trolling the fly, before their brothers came on the scene late in the afternoon. Great were the greetings; and it was the boatman who petitioned that they should get out after dinner and fish till dark night, for, as he said to me, "the countenance of them would decoy you." So they fished and caught their fish, the evening closing with wild excitement when the single boy who had been out of luck reeled up excitedly as we trolled home; and when a fish came in on the bob-

fly, the tail of the cast was still deep in water, and he landed two at once.

And of all the people in the boat I believe the boatman was the most pleased—although we had kept him out till ten o'clock that evening. Irish people are surprisingly fond of children, and we had a pretty illustration of their fondness a few days later when a party of us rowed up Lough Columb to picnic and attempt the minnow on the Bolb, a deep stream which flows in at the head. After some not very serious fishing, we made our way in between the winding banks of a channel which flows in serpentine curves for a mile or so level with the lake. Rowing up this, we trailed the minnow, in hope of some monster of a black trout—but our chief capture was one little pinkeen, which had contrived somehow to seize a bait half as long as himself. At last we pulled in to a bank, and turned out our lunch, while the industrious boatman crossed the river, lifted a few turf from a neighbouring stack, and set to lighting a fire. By the time we had finished eating and drinking he had prepared for us a surprise dessert, small trout broiled in the embers, which those of us who dared

ate with our fingers—a messy proceeding; but the flavour of peat and an open-air appetite make brown trout delicious. Meanwhile, our journey up, and our rambles among the meadows which border on the Bolb, had interested the neighbourhood; and as we entered the lake and began to fish down, our boatman called our attention to a large pink object lying on top of a rock. It was, he said, a bunch of roses which a woman from one of the cottages had left there for us.

Looked at across the lake, it seemed like scarlet paper, and we all were convinced that our friend was joking. But as we fished the drift across and neared the shore, it became evident that he spoke the simple truth. There was an enormous nosegay of old-fashioned roses laid on a rock by the water's edge, and fixed there with a stone. He had seen the woman of a cottage on the hill above run down surreptitiously, leave them there, and disappear. So pretty a civility could not go unrecognised, so one of us, with a couple of the children, waded ashore with half-a-dozen trout in the net, made our way up through a field or two, and came on a little cottage of the usual

type, but, for a wonder, simply smothered in roses; and there was the pleasant, kindly little woman, who explained by saying that she had seen the children at the hotel, and lost her heart to them—though she had a tribe of her own. They all seem to think, as old Peggy, the guardian of St. Columb's birthplace, said to me, that "childer is a very heartsome thing about a place." And whatever boatman I ever fished with in Ireland, you might leave him in charge of small boys with perfect confidence that he would neither drown them (perhaps the most natural thing to do) nor lose his temper with them, nor, to use another of Peggy's words, "give them bad parables" in any way.

X

TIDE FISHING

It is easy to contemn what one cannot manage, and bait-fishing of every sort with the rod has always been the aversion of my incompetence. But this year I discovered the next best thing to good fly-fishing; indeed I hardly know when I enjoyed the catching of a fish with a fly so much as I did the capture of one white trout with the sand-eel in Ravensfort channel.

The sand-eel was born to be a bait. Silvery and shiny, he looks living when he has been dead for hours, and you need not impale him wriggling; once on, he stays there till a fish takes him away. How far different from the worm-fisher's grubby and tyrannic operations! Trailing the artificial minnow is clean work, of course, but then I have never trailed the minnow in any place

to compare for beauty and interest with this channel of Cearagh bay.

Ravensfort stands on an arm of water which runs up behind the cliff-girt mass of Curranbenny ; and at low tide the whole is stripped bare, a lovely expanse of clear sand, save for a channel, no broader than a good-sized river, which skirts the headland's inner shore ; and toward this drains through the sand another small trickle of water. The morning was beautiful when Billy the boatman and I walked down along the short grass of the links on the Ravensfort side to where his curragh was lying bottom up above tide-mark like a huge black slug. Raising a side of it, he slipped under the gunwale and lifted the craft on his head and shoulders, I trailing the oars with one hand and steadying the nose of the boat with the other, for a strong breeze out of the west was blowing.

These curraghs, as most people know, are made of tarred calico stretched over a hooping of willow rods ; the whole kept in shape by a frame of timber, which it was Billy's pride and profession to manufacture for the neighbourhood. In Donegal they build them pointed sharply, with well-

defined bows; elsewhere (and in Tory Island) they are, as one Ravensfort man said to me, for all the world like a wash-tub; and these rougher craft are propelled by paddles. But in Donegal they use oars, with small light blades, but made clumsy in appearance by the flat broad piece of wood nailed to the oar itself and pierced with a hole for the thole-pin. The whole equipment costs about £2 : 10s., and it will carry two rowers and two passengers in almost any sea —the passengers sitting in the bottom, bow and stern. A lady aboard is a danger, for the small high heels of her shoes may go through the calico between the interstices of the wicker-work; and Billy told me a story of a lame man, with a raised heel to his boot, who was helping to fill a boat with herrings, when the water began to come in more than could be accounted for. Luckily other curraghs were near by, the hole where this fellow had in the hurry put his heel through was plugged with caps and handkerchiefs, and a good weight of herrings being piled on, no one was the worse and the night's fishing not interrupted. After all, if you are accustomed to have nothing

but a strip of calico between you and a wild sea running under huge and unscalable cliffs, why should you fuss, because instead of the solid calico you have a makeshift of miscellaneous wearing apparel?

These boats do not divide the water; they go over it, much as a bird swims. Billy put down his burden at the nearest point of the small tributary trickle, and sent me along the sands nearer the main channel. He came down sidling like a crab, rowing across the breeze which was taking him fast by itself. A curragh will float in about four inches of water, and he was dexterously keeping off the places where there were only three. But when he came abreast of where I had found a kind of pool, he gave a pull of one paddle and a backward swirl of the other, more like the movement of a fish's fins than of oars—swung her clean round on her axis, and then, with almost the same motion, drove the blunt stern firm on to the sand. I stepped in, and, still sidling, we slipped down between long stretches of sandbank which rose from the blue strip of water.

Once we were in the main channel these

banks became peopled, for we were now a good mile from houses. Tall curlew were there, brown on the tawny sand; herons, too, silhouetted strangely against the sky where they stood, a couple of feet higher than our level; gulls were there, common gulls and herring gulls, in the white and grey plumage; and above all, dozens of sea-pies or oyster-catchers, the dandies among birds, with their smart black and white dress, neatly set off by red bills and red legs, and with I cannot tell you what elegant absurdity in their small twittering run.

All this while, of course, we were fishing, sidling down the channel or pulling up it, and I, unaccustomed to the work, was uncertain whether various tugs had been merely the strain of tide and wave or a fish's bite. However, Billy avouched them for bites; but in the meantime we were getting nothing. I had just hauled in my bait to make sure it was clear of sea-weed, when a sudden darkness came up, and a lash of rain with it. Well knowing that, on a river, this would put a stir on fish, I hurried to get my bait working, when the line, with the natural perversity of things, caught in

the hitchers of the rod and refused to move. In a curragh you must sit down and stay sitting, and the joint was wholly out of reach; I had to run the butt in under Billy's arm and free the line, while the bait hung almost under the boat. As I was in the very act of doing this, down went the line taut, the rod-point bent, and I thanked Providence that I had been just (if only just) in time. By the time I had the rod in its proper position the fish was fifty yards away and still running. We followed him, but not before he had got out nearly the last turn of my eighty yards. And a pretty dance he led us; making, I should be afraid to say how many of these long dashes and never showing, so that I put him down for six or seven pounds at the least. When at last he did break water, I could scarcely believe my eyes. The back which emerged was small to begin with, but one is prepared for that: the colour startled me. It was bright brown in the blue water,—but brown does not suggest lustre, and this was lustrous colour, like the reddish amber of a certain sea-weed. Frankly, in my ignorance, I was afraid that all this fuss had been about a

pollock, but Billy heaped contempt on my suggestion. And when, after a full ten minutes' hard play with salmon rod and tackle, we backed the curragh in and got out to land our prize, he was evidently a fish of under three pounds—but, as we had guessed already, hooked outside the mouth, so that he could keep his head down and his jaws tight in running.

It was no great capture; but for any lover of fish, the colour and shape of that trout as he lay on the sand was a sheer delight. His back was hardly darker than his belly, and the colour that was on it cannot be defined in words — except by saying that he was precisely the colour of a new-caught sand-eel. After he had lain in the boat a while, the blue began to appear, and by the time we brought him home he was just like any fresh-run white trout you may catch in the river—or very little sheenier. But when he came out of the water his back shone like the sun.

He was the only one I was destined to get, for spring, not autumn, is the proper season for this fishing. But we fished on, and before long had another run on the

line; I raised my rod-point, and saw with huge disgust a large gull rise from where the bait trailed. I had not hooked him, but Billy assured me that he had often been annoyed by them, and often had hauled them in, flapping with a hook in their mouths.

Yet if I caught nothing, I was well content. The shower had passed over across the bay, and sun followed, striking on the travelling mass of vaporous water, and making it a rich smoky purple such as Turner loved; nearer us, the sandbank, wetted by the deluge, showed deep orange against the blue sea and this purple pall that swept over between us and the mountains opposite, against whose shores waves leapt and flung in white brilliance.

There was white water, too, close by, where the channel narrowed to its mouth, and beyond the bar the waves of the incoming tide broke and foamed. And over the bar and its shallows birds wheeled and circled, half-a-dozen gannets among them, in pursuit of sand-eel and fry. Gulls fishing are always a good sight, but gannets hold a place by themselves. With a few swift

long strokes they would beat up into the wind, then, swinging round, would slant down before it for thirty or forty yards, till the quick eye detected something, and a wave of the wide wings checked them; then, veering for a moment, they would turn, one wing up, the other down, and, stiffening every feather and fibre of their body, plunge headlong, with a sudden impetus imperceptibly given, meeting the water edgeways like a slate that has been jerked with a spin into the air.

And all about one was the fresh strong air of the west blowing across the sandy neck of Curranbenny from the Atlantic; on our left, clean sand, on our right, amber seaweed and rocky shore; everywhere to be seen were wild and lovely shapes of hill and mountain, everywhere the dance and ripple of blue wind-tossed water.

But the feature in the landscape which most delighted Billy was a man on the bank. White trout cannot be taken without a salmon license, and as soon as I was espied playing one, down came a water-bailiff, as indeed he was in duty bound. But he had come once before on Billy, in an evil hour,

and found him fishing the long line on a Sunday, which is an illegal act, the long line being a "fixed engine." It was a new interpretation of the law, and Billy resented it; and now, in the wildest glee, he dodged coyly with the curragh, affected to look away, and generally behaved as if he wished to elude discovery,—praying devoutly all the time that we might hook another fish and land it under the bailiff's nose, before my license was brandished in his face. This we did not do, but we kept the watcher walking up and down for the best part of an hour; and I am sure Billy would cheerfully have rowed the curragh till dark if he could have kept his foe in a state of unprofitable expectation of another fine.

The capture of sand-eels—again I say, how unlike worm-fishing—is a sport in itself, as I found one day when I went out to observe the operation. Billy, bare-legged and bare-armed, was knee-deep in a shallow of the main channel. The water was wide about him, but he held a long-bladed knife in one hand, with which he made a swift pass through the water, put down the other hand, and lifted a small, shining, wriggling

creature held between his palm and the blade. It looked like magic ; and when I tried the trick it was more than ever unintelligible. However, one soon learnt to plunge the knife straight into the fine sand under the water, and bring the blade, edge foremost, from right to left till it met the very faintest obstruction. Then, keeping the knife in its place, you lowered the other hand, palm down, to meet it, and fetching the blade upward, caught the creature between the edge and the hand. But, needless to say, I was far indeed from attaining the mastery with which Billy could swoop apparently regardless through the water, and at every circle bring up one, or often two or three, ready to drop in the bucket which he held between his knees.

It was play in the summer, but in the chill of spring, when the eels are few and far between, the game becomes cruel work. Fishers prefer then to dig them, as I have seen it done in the Douros channel, at the ebb of springtide, standing out on the farthest limit of the bank, where the sand is half water, and every moment you sink ankle-deep. The remedy is to strike the

spade in hastily, draw it out, and step on the place where the suction closes up the sand-particles and gives a moment's footing. I have seen the whole sandbank opposite Douros House crowded like a fair-green with people busy at this digging.

Up in the Douros channels is the place specially famous for the white-trout fishing, and we tried it there one evening on our way to Carrig Castle—not so much in the hopes of fish as from desire to see the demesne, which in old days was free of access to all—as indeed are most of the beautiful parks in Ireland; but since the present tenant took the place its beauties are guarded as if in a Turkish harem; so that—whether the tenant be in residence or no—to view the lawns and woods sloping down to its exquisite bays, you must take a boat on what, thank heaven, cannot be *mare clausum*. The view was all we got for our fishing, except one small "glassin" or black pollock.

Pollock, in its different types of *sheein*, *glassin*, and *lythe*, are the sea-angler's main stand-by. The sheein are the young fish, to be caught in numbers off the rocks, which

develop into whiting-pollock and glassin (black pollock, saithe, or coal-fish). Of these latter we caught none, though of the pollock or lythe we brought in more weight than our friends thanked us for, since a frugal hotel-keeper used to give them to his guests for lunch ; and lythe, though it might make a good kedgeree, is contemptible when simply boiled.

It is a thousand pities that such splendid-looking fish, and such game fighters, should be so useless. Of course they would not be useless if they flourished, for example, off an Italian shore, where they would be concocted into wonderful and excellent dishes. But an Irish or English cook in seaside towns has no ideas beyond boiling or frying, and pollock emphatically need some further embellishment. We got accordingly little value out of them, beyond the joy of their capture, and that for small boys was delirious ; indeed for any one, fishing and catching large fish under such conditions must be enjoyable.

For to fish for pollock from Ravensfort you must row down the channels, skirting along the landward face of the mountain

island, Curranbenny, cross the bar, where the curragh leaps and sidles, and row out along the cliffs, with lines trailing close in to the rocky base and the long streaming kelp-beds that fringe it. The cliffs begin by being a sheer wall of fifty feet; they rise on and on as you round point after point of jutting rock, or slip inside of some craggy insulated bastion, until at last you open Skate Bay, a semicircle, perhaps a mile round the edge, yawning in the eastward face of the Head. All above this bay the cliffs rise sheer and unscalable to a height of five hundred feet; they frown black above you, diversified with brilliant patches of close green grass, but chequered more wonderfully still with the innumerable colonies of sea-birds.

It was August when we first went round, and the bulk of the birds had left this favourite breeding-place. Yet to whoever had not seen the cliffs in June, this would have seemed incredible, so numberless was the throng of sea-gulls, young and old, perched on the cliffs, nestled in the ledges, or hovering about them. Close by the water's edge sat in dozens the sinister black cormorants, and beside them divers, a little smaller and far

more graceful,—brown, with that hint of olive which runs through the colour of all haunters of sea-weed ; their heads and necks tapered and sinuous like a snake's. Here and there a guillemot sat upright and solemn in front of its nest, and uttered its curious croak. But the joy of our hearts were the droll little puffins—schools of them swimming near the boat with their clumsy, ill-turned parrot heads, or shooting on swift wings down and out from the rocks. They nest high in the cliff, tunnelling in the patches of earth to the very top ; and since the hole's mouth gives no room to spread sail, they leap outwards with shut wings, drop several yards, and then the quick pinions begin to beat. I do not know what there is so friendly and familiar about puffins, but I had as soon kill a robin. Those that we saw were much belated : according to Billy, birds that had lost their one egg at the first venture, and had been forced to begin the business over again. At all events, at our first trip they were in scores ; ten days later hardly one could be seen.

The first trip was a dead failure from a fishing point of view. We had gone to

trail for mackerel with flies and spinners, and except for a couple caught at the same moment, never saw one. But just as we turned to go home, the small boy who was in the bows of the curragh cried out, then grew doubtful, and after a moment's hauling brought in his line with the three strands of gut snapped. We caught good-sized pollock after, but this one, he said, he had not been able to move. Still, the gut ought to have been more than either he or a fish could snap.

We saw no more of lythe that day, and we were in a hurry home, for we had gone out with a light air from the west and the Head was between us and the weather. But the wind veered suddenly to the south-east, and began to blow sharp out of Douros, raising not a swell, which is harmless, but a short jabble. If I had not had perfect confidence in my boatman, that row home would have been a trying experience. Wind and wave were apparently both driving us towards the cliffs, but Billy crept round the rocks with the blade of his oar all but touching. At times, where the wind and tide met him strong, he would barely make an inch of

way ; but there the little boat was held tossing within ten feet of jagged rocks. One touch would have been enough ; not only were they jagged, but rough like a file with the coats of grey limpets, and beds of mussels that shone like jet through the wash of water. But Billy seemed perfectly at his ease, though the boatman of another curragh with visitors in her put back and into a shelter behind some projecting rocks ; and we sat still and watched, while a couple of mackerel fishers, sculling double, came up abreast to pass the time of day. At the top of each wave one could see their curragh sitting on a piece of its bottom not much bigger than a good-sized plate, with the bows clean out of water. It is a bumpy business, and after we got in I at least had the beginnings of a headache.

Billy was not given to explanations, but when I commented on the course he took to another sea-going man, "Ah," he said, "that was Billy's wisdom. There's a wash off them rocks that would not let the curragh touch, and he came in the slack like an eddy that it makes round them." Thinking of that I began to understand why a salmon

net run out a hundred yards from the cliffs in the mouth of this bay, eight miles wide, will kill fish in scores; for probably the salmon have no more liking than anything else to face the tremendous tide that runs out of these channels and round the Head.

We met this tide outside another day. Two small boys had gone off with Billy and returned radiant, dragging a dozen or so of pollock, from five pounds down to one; they would probably have got twice as many, but by ill-luck had only one artificial eel aboard, and the fish would look at nothing else. So a few days later we set off, one boy trailing a line from the bow, another from the stern, and myself keeping a third clear with an old stump of a rod. This day was less favourable, and we had neared the Horn, or highest crag of Curranbenny—an hour's rowing—before fish began to take. Partly on the chance of a big lythe—for the biggest were said to lie out there—and partly to look at the smooth sheer face of the Horn itself from the sea, we asked Billy to row out and round the "flag of the Horn," a great ledge of flat rock at the base. It had been blowing hard for a day or two, and once we

passed the shelter of the cliff, the swell was very big indeed, and put up a tremendous wash over the "flag-stone." We had to sheer off a bit, and it seemed impossible that a boat with so little grip of the water could be brought round at all. However, Billy said she was moving, and sure enough in five or ten minutes we had ridden over the waves, not meeting them direct but sidling over with the bow three-quarters on; and the Horn was looming straight above us. I had often watched the curraghs from above, crawling like water-spiders two hundred yards below me; but to be out there, and secure, gave one an astonishing sense of man's mastery. But man needed to be a master of his implement of mastery, or that sea would soon have flung him and his cockleshell broadcast on the bay.

The big lythe would have nothing to say to our eels, and we turned in again past the extraordinary little hut that is built in the cliff face for a watcher of the salmon nets. Two men tenant it together, dependent on a boat for their supplies; and except in the finest of weather no boat can reach them. They had left this unattractive

fastness for the season when we passed, and just opposite their door we got three or four lythe in a minute or two; it was a study to watch the faces of the small boys when at the end of their hauling they reached the gimp, and had to pull against a strong fish with the thin wire cutting into their fingers.

They are wonderfully strong brutes, these fish. I had been doing badly with the rod, but at last hooked a five-pounder, and reeled in on him as hard as I could wind—for if they go down into the kelp it is odds but you lose all. Billy's old rod had been spliced again and again, and it bent to the water's edge and cracked ominously. I could scarcely have believed that a fish of that weight would have had such power, even with the rod's leverage. With a salmon, of course, one never really feels the full force, as tackle is not meant to stand it; but I found it easy to believe Billy's story of the big lythe which can tow the curragh about after them; and I hope another year to try the weight of one of them with a good stiff rod. Far more fixed, however, is my purpose and desire to make my way to Ravensfort some week

in spring, when sand-eels stay buried deep in the sand, and to offer one to the white trout is to offer a rarity. Then, if stories be true, it is not one three-pounder I shall catch, but a creelful, and not three-pounders only, but here and there a salmon-sized fish. This may be a sanguine forecast, and I give it for what it is worth. One thing, however, is clearly ascertained by Billy's experience: though the bay should be full of salmon, not one will you get on your bait. And yet a salmon in fresh water will take the minnow freely. Unaccountable beasts!

XI

"THE LOW COUNTRY"

At Ravensfort the only prospect of fly-fishing had seemed to be in a little lough (and a good little lough it is) not far from the town towards the base of Muckish. There was also the possibility of another lake which a friend had stocked with rainbow and Loch Lomond trout some time back. I tried it twice, other people tried it much oftener, and our unanimous conclusion was that the rainbow trout should be fished only with a net. Sulky brutes—but big! The only one taken this year fell to a policeman and weighed six pounds.

Luckily, however, the possibilities were extended when leave was very graciously given me to fish in three small rivers which fall into the sea about half-way between Curranbenny and Knocknanoo. The

nearest was also the biggest, and I tried it first in a rising flood, uselessly of course, and saw nothing except one perverse grilse or white trout which snapped at my fly just as I was lifting for the cast. Next day, however, it was to my mind in fine fishing order, though local opinion declared it to be only fit for the worm. I marched up past the first fall (a noble sight with the rush of brown water down its three leaps) and came to the first pool above; fished it down half-way and a grilse of about five pounds took fast hold—or so I thought, till after about seven or eight minutes' play the hook came out of him without the least apparent reason.

We made the appropriate remarks and fished down to the tail of the pool, where in the shallow I got a rise; fished over him, and again he swirled in the water, but did not touch the hook. This was, of course, the indication for a smaller fly, and taking off the No. 5 claret which was on, I substituted a No. 7, and immediately hooked him. After a surprising deal of trouble I landed this one — the most contemptible grilse one could see, long and narrow, and

not able to turn the scale at 3 lbs. Still, he was a fish. I went up to the top and fished down with the smaller fly, though it seemed undersized for so heavy a water, and again about half-way down it was taken. This fish jumped after a while, showing quite a creditable salmon of some seven or eight pounds, and all seemed to be going well when again the hook came out as I was merely holding him. It was really sickening to lose two fish out of three on strong tackle in a hole which offered no difficulties. Still, the day was young, and after a couple more fishings I left the hole (like a born fool) and went up the river. It may be written down for the benefit of all inexperienced salmon-fishers that you can hardly spend too much time on any large pool where several salmon have risen. One is never safe in assuming that fish will rise elsewhere; and especially in the small mountainy rivers, hard to watch, perhaps the next hole will have been dragged.

I went up anyhow, and not another fish could I see before one o'clock, when I had to leave the water. The river, indeed, was in no order for the fly except in long deep

pools, and of these there were none for another two miles up right into the mountain. But the half-hour's exciting sport which I had that morning was enough to bring me back again and again through ten days of rainy weather (most of it only too propitious for the worm-fisher), riding five hilly miles and back in the hope that I might come on as good a rise again, and make more out of it.

Needless to say, I did not; and ill-luck dogged me, for out of seven fish hooked on that river I only got three. One of these I caught under circumstances that are rather rare, for the fish was not a yard from me when he took the fly. I was coming down the long series of rapids, and just below what is called the upper fall (though in simple truth half a mile or more of that river is one long cataract), I came on a countryman fishing with worm in the deep small hole where fish congregate when the water is too strong to make up; and he owned to having captured one, and assured me that the hole was full of them. The lie for fish was evidently under a steep side of rock on my bank,

but a small birch and a small oak grew over it, and made fishing difficult. I got between them, thinking the tail of the pool was the only chance as the water was high and much coloured; but nothing rose there. Then noticing that the rock below me was undercut, I turned the rod's point up stream, shortening the line to a few feet, and was just looking down at the two flies working in the bubbling, swirling torrent, and wondering if a fish could see them through that rush of water, when suddenly, right under my nose as I leant over, a dark back shot out of the water, and with a fine predatory rush the fish seized the bob-fly.

He was small and the tackle strong, so I took him down the rapids easily enough till the trailing tail-fly hooked a rock, and he was held up for a moment in a narrow pass where the gaff reached him. After that I always fished that hole with a single fly, but my precautions were never rewarded as my carelessness had been. A stronger fish could not have been so easily steered to my own side, and might quite well have followed the natural run of the water, which went to

the other bank, as I learnt in an ignominious moment. After hooking this fish I placed him in my basket and removed my lunch to a pocket. Then, as I returned and proceeded to fish the hole again (always a feat of gymnastics), the parcel of sandwiches seized an occasion to fall into the water. I jumped for my landing net, but the swirl had caught the package; I dashed to the foot of the pool, followed by a small boy, but could see no sign of it; and at last the worm-fisher, also an amused spectator, signalled it going down, swung by the eddy to the far side.

The water was too dangerous to risk a step on stones, and from fall to fall I raced down, following the white object which still rode high on the water, till a fresh swirl brought it within a long stretch, and I landed it safely—moist but still eatable, and not to be despised at that distance from any other provender.

I mean by this, from any food that I could lawfully come by; but many is the pleasant meal I begged on that river. On my first wet tramp I tried to buy, and knocked at the door of a neat, well-built

cottage. It was opened to me by as pretty a girl as one could see—with the rich dark colouring that crops up wherever there is a pure Celtic strain. Her husband was a stout, good-looking boy, and it was pleasant to watch their delight over the baby with which they were still (in Donegal phrase) "very new fangled," and their pride in the good cottage that the boy had built with his own hands. We discoursed for an hour or two, while I dried myself, or tried to, and ate potatoes and milk, bread and butter, and drank tea without stint. But when I proposed paying, such a thing could not be heard of. The pleasant woman of the house where day after day I stabled my bicycle put the feeling of the country into words: "A cup of tea,—is it pay for the like of that? Why, we think no more of it than if we had it growing." Once even, far up in the hills, when I was badly famished and remote from any known cottage, I inquired for food. The cabin was what I am glad to say is rare nowadays —stable or byre as well as dwelling-place; and the old woman who inhabited it had hardly a word of English. Yet in spite of

her evident and extreme poverty my conscience has not been easy as to whether I did right to insist on secretly leaving my small payment on her table in exchange for the lump of griddle bread which I took with me. "I couldn't take money" was almost the only phrase in English that she could muster.

At other places one could make exchange with cakes from the town, papers, or such like; but nowhere could I give as much as I got; though indeed in the face of such free hospitality one does not make a debtor and creditor balance. Certainly, Gaelic Ireland has very agreeable conventions of its own, and there is no place in Ireland more thoroughly Gaelic than these northern glens of what is called in Donegal "the low country."

The most purely and typically Gaelic of them all is the glen where I write to-day, staying in what was once a priest's house and is now the home of a returned Klondyke miner. Three of them from this parish ran a claim together; two are back now and settled in the glen, the third is expected; and about here you see fine

crops, good fences, the land kindly used and yielding in return—not, as elsewhere, starved and unfertile.

They are travelled men, these ex-miners, but not denationalised, as I soon discovered; and indeed there is hardly a man or woman in the glen who has not an enlarged experience of the world. For out of every household men and women go to seek labour; the men to Scotland or England, the girls and boys to the "Lagan" or Protestant Ulster. The existence of this class of migratory labourers has been much deprecated by those who wish well to Ireland, but a week of living actually among them and conversing with those familiar with the life, has made me very doubtful as to whether this attitude of mind can be justified.

England must always be Ireland's great market; and in England there will always be a great demand for labour, for man-power. When Ireland becomes a prosperous country of manufactures, the case may be changed; but for the present migratory labour is the alternative to emigration, and to my thinking an excellent alternative. These people, it is true, own farms; but they own them

mainly as places in which to build a house and rear a family in good air, and with the environment which pleases them. Here the family, not the individual, is still the unit; sons and daughters, till they marry, work for the family, and every penny that they earn "across the water," beyond what is needful to pay their current expenses, comes back to the head of the house. The kind old priest told me that he calculated the incomings to his parish from this source at £8000 each May and November. (The parish is, of course, at least ten miles square.) When a son marries, a new household is formed, and he ceases to be bound to his parents; yet even so, when the old folk can work no more, a roof is always kept over them. But, till his marriage, a man living in his father's house has no claim on what he earns; on the other hand, his father will not send him to fair or market without money enough to do the family credit. Pride helps in this matter; and moreover, a son who crosses to Scotland will not come back unless he gets good treatment at home.

That makes the case of these people very different from that of those small farmers

in Ulster, living wholly off the product of their own land, whose way of life and work was so mercilessly analysed in Dr. O'Gara's book *The Green Republic*.' There the son is apt to become almost a serf, a labourer without wage, while he lives at home; there fathers are often tyrannical, for the one recognised alternative to the home life is emigration, for good and all. And moreover, in the opinion of my host at least, who spoke from boyish experience of hired labour, life in these purely agricultural districts of Ulster is cramped and sordid; every penny is grudged. But in Crishvally the colour of money is not so scarce; it is spent frugally, indeed, but with a certain freedom, since more can be made, and without a breaking-up of home ties. The old priest told me that when the season of migration came, the departing ones were like men going to their holidays—perhaps one should say rather like cheerful boys going back to school. They were returning to a change of occupation, of food, and of faces; going as a sailor goes on his voyage, but with this difference by all accounts, that, whether men or women, they take with them that

rigid Irish standard of sexual morality which so distresses Mr. George Moore and other recent writers upon the Irish question.

It is a little droll after reading *The Untilled Field* to go and stay in Glena, where every one is Catholic and hardly a word of English is heard. Are these the sombre priest-ridden folk, whose very life is crushed out of them, *gravi sub religione?* In summer most of them are away, and festivities are fewer; in winter they dance two or three evenings every week. Yet even in summer they could show us what an Irish night's entertainment meant.

For when some of us wanted to get up a little gaiety in Ravensfort, a community largely Protestant, it was to Glena we came for our moving spirit, who could dance elaborate jigs, sing Gaelic songs, recite for us in Gaelic or in English; it was a Glena boy who taught the ladies of our party the figures of two or three intricate and pretty Irish reels till they could take their share in the dancing. And it was to Glena itself that these ladies came to see Irish country dances danced by country boys and girls, whose sense of rhythm was faultless, and

every one of whom was perfect in the complicated steps.

Only some twenty or thirty came in, for the dance was to be in the sitting-room used as my study, and things needed to be kept quiet if there was to be room for dancing at all. But of those twenty or thirty, not a boy or girl but could take part in one of the involved and very pretty reels; and many could perform well in the more difficult country dances—*cúrsaí tíre*—which the old blind fiddler played with great spirit for the pairs who danced them. My host walked through two or three reels, with the suggestion of the Far West and Bret Harte's stories strong about his light lean figure and drooping moustache; but for the most part he sat in a corner with his little boy on his knee; and the child, with his lovely curls a little tumbled and soft cheeks flushed (for he had been lifted from sleep to see the fun), was as pretty a picture as you could desire as he watched with large blue puzzled eyes the evolutions of the dancers. It was a homely, hospitable evening, and it spoke eloquently of the habit of gay social intercourse, which makes the glen a place to which men come

back gladly not only from six months' work in Scotland with their earnings, but from the gold-fields with a fine round fortune to deposit in the bank.

For these migrants doubtless the main charm of the place is in the people and the way of life; but there is beauty enough and to spare in all these valleys. I used to ride out from Ravensfort to the Ray river, over five steep miles of road—so laborious in the ascents that one needed more compensation than the swift downhill runs could give one. But the compensation was lavish, for, as I set out, the mountains were on my left, the sea on my right; and nowhere in Ireland is there known to me a range of hills so beautifully grouped as this northern chain from Errigal to Muckish, when seen from the seaward. At the east end of it is Muckish, a huge bulk shaped like a peat stack; next it, a lower, long, serrated ridge, Crocknalaragher; then Aghla, beautiful among mountains, with its two exquisitely-modelled peaks, rising at each end like a woman's shapely breasts; and to close the chain, Errigal itself, a gaunt pyramid, stripped of all vegetation and covered with white mica that glistens when the sun

strikes it. But between this peak and the western mamelon of Aghla rises "Wee Errigal," or, in the Gaelic, *Mac Uchtar*, the son of Errigal's lap—a lesser image of the great mountain, carrying the horizon line up with echoes of the pattern, as if artfully designed to complete the composition of the whole.

All this range stands out grouped to the eye in a single glance, and as you travel westward the grouping shifts, but the group is always seen as a unity. And no one who knows Ireland needs to be told how cloud-shadows fleet and change on these mountain masses, and over the lower-lying stretch of glen and moorland. One day sticks in my memory, when the mountains had that glory of distinct colour which only comes in bright sunshine after rain; but away to the north-west, over the whaleback of the Bloody Foreland, a dark mass of thundercloud threatened to blot out the whole landscape. I was riding towards it, it was drifting towards me, and as it drew nearer the blackish purple grew more and more intense; then the sunshine from the left caught the clouds' under-edges and overlaid them with a gloss like that of

velvet; one could see the ridges and ravines in the lower surface of the vapour-bank. It came closer and closer, more and more sinister and splendid; then, for a final perfection, swept seaward to the right of me, still murky and ominous, but content to afford a spectacle without exacting the penalty of a wet skin.

Finer even perhaps, in that week of thunderous weather, was the sky one day as I rode home. The sun was just sinking into a mass of cloud not too heavy to be rifted and illumined with a glory of red and gold; and full across this splendour, rising out of the blue, were the battlemented cliffs of Tory Island, where it lay like some greater Windsor dropped in mid-sea. And as I came yet nearer home, watching the pageant over my left shoulder, the western side of Curran-benny began to block out sight of the water, and in its place gave me the sand-hill, some five hundred feet high, with its shoulder of cream-white rising against the western vapour-furnace, which threw over the whiteness a reflection of its own ruddy heart.

Tory was the main feature of the Ray river. As you fished up, the great slopes of

Muckish heaved up before you; but when you turned for home there was always blue sea seen far off and framed between verges of heather near by, and of green bent-grown sand-hills in the distance. Then, as you rounded a bend in the river's winding, out into this gap would start that strange eastern end of the big island, which makes its name ("Torach," the Towered) so obviously significant. It was hard to believe that the outline which rose there, most often in deep purple, was not shaped by some Titanic builder of the middle ages, erecting in mid-sea his bluff fastness, majestic in its strong beauty, square and solid against all assaults.

At Glena, on the other hand, the river, winding deeper in a valley and with more level course, gave no view seaward. Here the centre of the spectacle is inland. For the whole head of the glen is blocked by the pyramid of Errigal, and, facing full down the ravine, is an edge of that pyramid, so sharp, so fiercely jagged as it runs up to the clean apex that it makes of the mountain—not a thousand yards high—an object by far more imposing than many an Alp. I planned to try the climb, which would be a climb in

all seriousness, but never did it; never even ascended the low grass-topped hill, Beltany, whose name keeps (as does another on the Foyle side) memories of the Druid fires. Those fires still burn in Donegal each Eve of St. John; from them men still carry lighted splinters to throw into the fields and bring luck to the young crops; and still boys jump through the flame as they did when Ovid described, far south in Italy, the same ancient and pagan usage, originated no man knows how or where.

My travels at Glena lay by the riverside; but the river—a stream rather—never maintained the promise of my first experience, when I killed in the hour after sunset of one bright day three white trout weighing five pounds among them, and provided dinner for our guests of the dance. But though the fishing was of no great merit, nothing was to me more enjoyable than the few days spent among people who spoke the Irish language for all uses, and kept the Irish customs living and prosperous. It was a real vexation to depart—all the more because I left the stream in a flood that had not yet settled down to be fishable.

And a final blow came as I settled myself into the railway carriage, and tied up my rods lugubriously for the last time. A young man with dogs and birds leapt hastily in as the train went off; he was a riverside acquaintance, and as we greeted each other, "That was a good fish you lost the other day," he said.

It did not surprise me that he knew how in my last day's fishing on the Ray river I had hooked a fish which ran hard about the pool for a minute, then put me under a rock and broke me: we all knew by the riverside who had killed fish and who had lost them. But I was surprised with his pretensions to know its size, and said meekly that I never saw the fish.

"I did," he said; "I saw him swimming about in the pool with your cast hanging from his mouth." "And he was big?" I asked. "Anything from ten to fifteen pounds."

Well, on that river a fish over ten pounds is a rarity; if I had got one approaching fifteen my fame would have been established for ever. And I had hooked this fish so thoroughly that the fly had remained fast for a week. Anglers will judge of my

feelings, and will, I trust, sympathise if I confess the error of my ways.

The last fish I had killed on the river (and in this identical pool) I had got with a trout fly (the blue and silver) and trout tackle. Other anglers fishing the same day with more orthodox weapons had done no good, and this increased in me my favourite vanity; all the more because I had seen no fish on the water much above five pounds. And so this day (a Friday) when I came to fish I put up the same strongish trout cast and small flies. When I looked at the water I realised that rain in the night had made a slightly larger fly necessary, but in my folly I put it on the same cast, although I had to hand the light salmon gut appropriate for such a day. I rose a fish, failed to stir him again, then lower in the hole hooked another; a dash down, a dash up, showed me that for the present he must have full liberty. He was quiet for a minute, then moved, then began to run, and the reel screeched, but the line remained stationary on the water. Then everything stopped.

Any inexperienced angler to whom this

happens—and it happened to me twice this year—will be inclined to think that the fish has run plumb down to the bottom of some abysmal hole. Nothing of the sort. He has got the line round a stone, and is running (ten to one) up stream. Your business is to try and get the line straight, and not to pull at it.

To do myself justice, I tried a little; I walked up stream and down; I tried throwing stones, though on reflection I know I threw them where he could not be—that is, under the point where the line met the water. Then I pulled, forgetting altogether the weakness of my tackle. It was rooted in my mind that the bob-fly had fouled, though I might have known by the length of line taken out that it was far away from the obstacle. As the end of my pulling the thing came clear for a little, then stuck; and I had to cross the river, when I did pull it wholly clear—proving, of course, that if I had done this at first I should have cleared my line with the fish still on.

There were half-a-dozen things I could have done. I could have waded out below, and probably in that way could have

straightened the angle; I could have let the line wholly slack, when it might have drifted clear; I could—and this was the first thing to do—have stopped to think, for the fish was sulking. But I did none of these things, and consequently I broke my cast in the best fish I hooked this summer, and in a river where a good fish would be a real triumph.

Such were the thoughts that beset me as I journeyed towards Dublin—the real regrets of an angler. I write them down that whoever can may avoid my mistakes. But above all, this should be written down. Trout tackle in fishing for salmon ought only to be used when there is no chance at all with the stouter gut. On that day the small claret-fly would, I am sure, have hooked that fish just as well on a proper cast. Small flies do not necessitate the lighter line; but a really experienced fisherman would, even with my tackle, have in all probability killed the fish which now haunts me with regrets.

I am sorry too about the hook in his jaw. But long before this doubtless some one has passed by with a gaff or a pitch-

fork, and there has been a good dinner in a thatched cottage. A big fish so visible as that does not remain long visible in a small mountain stream.

I wish, however, that I had not met my riverside acquaintance. Else I should have remained in the belief that I had merely been defeated by an active and determined grilse, and the last hours which I spent in Donegal this summer would not have been overshadowed by so dark a gloom.

XII

THE KAABAH OF ANGLERS

It is very difficult for a person who is keenly interested in life at first hand to enter into the joys of a collector. What is new, what is in the making, what holds in it perhaps the seeds of the future, has little attraction for the picker-up of rarities: he dredges for the wreckage of the past. And yet, by an odd inconsistency, he is most vividly alert to capture something that shall make the past seem present—some piece of flotsam which, instead of suffering the common fate, has lingered in a back eddy, and now passes, belated, on its way to that annihilation of all material objects, from which his drag-net can give it a short or a long reprieve. My metaphor, which is none of the newest, demands a bank to the stream of time, on which may be carefully reposited and lifted

out of the flux of things such articles as the world or fate decides shall be not altogether transitory. The collector, as I conceive him, has a double function. Sometimes he brings up out of the flood objects whose real beauty entitles them to the reprieve—things of intrinsic value. But, more often, his choicest spoils are such as in themselves have no claim to be rescued from the general doom, yet, for the sake of some man or some event whose memory has been preserved, inherit a worthy place in our regard. We are grateful to the collectors, almost as to the historians, yet I cannot but wonder at them. There are hundreds of highly intelligent men who would have paid high for Lord Edward Fitzgerald's snuffbox, but would not have crossed the street to see Parnell. Now indeed, now that the uncrowned king is fairly under ground, and on his way to become a legend, they will prick their ears at the mention of his name: but they follow the precept in Aristotle, and will always wait to see the end.

In presence of these votaries of the past I feel myself rebuked for crudity. The present with its stirring life is, after all, so

obvious, so intrusive; it has not the settled dignity of what comes down. And if I do not envy, I admire the more, their latest acquisition, the authentic treasure-trove. Yet my friends, the well-turned legs of whose Chippendale I praise heart-whole—*teretesque suras integer laudo*—whose first editions I handle with discreet enthusiasm—whose portfolio-guarded prints I care for perhaps as much as they do, yet without the desire of possession—would rather, I know, see the ill-repressed twinge of jealousy in a rival hunter's face, or detect in his voice the light inflection of spleen. The charmed circle which I never enter is a circle of their dearest enemies.

Still, from the outside, I distinguish sharply between collector and collector. The stamp-hunter has no place in my regard; he yields basely to the lust of acquisitiveness, anxious only to have what some one else has not. It is a competition over counters, meaningless save for the competition; and counters whose value is decidedly their market-price. With all collectors who deserve the name the mere fact of rarity must weigh; and no man

need be reckoned seriously in the list who does not pride himself upon a bargain. But there are men who collect not less for beauty than for rarity, or for that skill of workmanship which is almost beauty, and who value the historic and the human interest far beyond any consideration of a selling price. In a word, there are the collectors who have the artist's instinct and the scholar's; there are those who have only the passion of the miser for his hoard. And high in the most honourable class would rank the friend whose singular good fortune I have the honour to relate, and whom (after the bygone fashion) I will call simply by his appropriate adjective, Virtuoso.

Virtuoso, then, is a collector born and bred; but not of the tragic variety. He need not deny himself life's comforts, nor scrimp his stomach to fulfil the desire of his eyes. The bragging purchase of some world's wonder in the crowded auction-room is not for him; but neither does he need to pass a treasure for the lack of some few pounds. He has no narrow limitations of taste; whatever is rare and fine, whether

it come from east or west, from two thousand years back or from the day of our grandfathers, has its interest for him. And for a final perfection—perhaps the most important for the collector's own felicity—Virtuoso has no wife. Was there ever yet a woman who saw with contentment, and with that entire sympathy which an enthusiast must inevitably exact, money transforming itself daily into objects, many of which are expensive, and all of which gather dust?

Virtuoso, then, this model of his kind, had occasion to take his way from a point in the south-western district to the City. The day was unattractive, and he debated in his mind the question of a bus, but decided for the advantages of a constitutional. Observe the finger of Providence. His way took him through a street in Westminster, quite out of his habitual beat, and in that street was a shop, which you or I would have passed unregarding. Not so the collector, whose well-trained eye detected from across the road a brown leather object in the window with a label attached to it, "Izaak Walton's Fishing-

Bag." Well, of course, on the face of it, no collector was going to believe that! If you saw advertised for sale in a casual window Shakespeare's pen, Nelson's spy-glass, Sir Joshua's palette, would you attach any importance to the label? Still less would a collector, who knows by long experience the wicked ways of dealers. And, in sober earnest, neither Shakespeare's pen nor Nelson's spy-glass, could they be proved genuine, would excite a much keener emulation among collectors than Izaak Walton's fishing-bag.

Fame is an odd thing. Here was a little London linen-draper, a man of parts, no doubt, distinguished by his friends, distinguished by the trust reposed in him, but still a linen-draper living in a very quiet way, who in the evening of his life published a little book about his favourite recreation. And to-day, for the English-speaking race, there is one Abraham, one Jacob, one Rachel, one Rebecca, and so on, but there are two Izaacs. The draper disputes the patriarch's monopoly: one is thankful to him at times for having adopted a different spelling of the name. Is this

hyperbole? I hardly think so. But at all events consider the case of Dr. Donne. Donne was Dean of St. Paul's (in itself no small position), a Dean famous for his eloquence, for his subtlety, and also all-famous for his conversion; marked with that romantic halo which distinguishes the saint who once has enjoyed a very different reputation. For this dean was the author of poems, as we all know, which he suppressed indeed, but which none the less circulated, until, with his good will or without it, Donne occupied to Ben Jonson much the same relation as Browning bore to Tennyson in the estimation of contemporaries. Donne's poetry survives, I know; it is read by the handful of literary persons who really read, and who read poetry, but of this illustrious figure, poet, orator, divine, dignitary, what does the world know? Why, that Walton wrote his life. Or take again Sir Henry Wotton, a great courtier, a great diplomatist, a fine poet, courteous and affable, one who unbent so far as to fish with the accomplished little Fleet Street trader. To-day there are forty thousand men who know Walton's name for one

who has heard of Wotton. It might seem, indeed, that this were impossible, for are not the two names indissolubly united by Walton's frequent mention of his distinguished friend and quotation of his writings? But the immortal Izaak has risen far beyond the repute that goes with first-hand knowledge; he survives as a personality, like Johnson, vaguely familiar to thousands who never read a line that came from his pen. He is more a genius than a man—the patron saint of his craft.

And now Virtuoso was being asked to believe that he saw before him Izaak Walton's fishing-bag. It was too much for credulity. For generations, men had rummaged archives to discuss every little detail of the man's life; and here before him, there cropped up what purported to be, not some indifferent relic, a book with his autograph, a piece of his furniture, but the very sign and symbol of his own peculiar mystery—the one thing of all others that a collector could most desire.

It may be said, perhaps, that I attach an undue importance to the relic. The bag is not essential to the angler; the rod is.

Granted. And still, if one of the two was miraculously destined to re-emerge, to slip out of its long stay in the back eddy of things—for of course I have to explain that this treasure was no other than the real article—I am glad it was the creel. The rod would have been a disillusionment. It would have brought home to us relentlessly the fact which so many gloze over to their imagination, or only whisper to their own souls—that after all Izaak was by the essence and temperament of him addicted to the baser branches of the sport. Let us say it and chance the consequences. He preferred the natural fly to the artificial, and the worm to either. And I greatly fear that if we were confronted with his rod, it would be too apparently of the kind that is naturally left on the bank to fish by itself while the owner sits under a sycamore tree and rhapsodises about the sweet smells of earth and meadow-grass after summer rain.

But the bag—that tells no tales but such as one would gladly hear; and if it is not essential to the act of angling, it is certainly indispensable in more ways than one to the angler's comfort and pleasure. Changes of

fashion, modern improvements, have detracted no whit from its respectability; there it is to-day, as sound, strong, and serviceable as it was two hundred and fifty years ago when the Londoner strapped it on his back. That is why Virtuoso bought it.

The bag was a rarity, for one seldom sees a wallet of such a shape; and it was a model of good workmanship. Three pieces of the stoutest leather—such leather as makes the very best portmanteaux—composed the fabric: a flat piece to lie against the back; a large rounded piece, admirably cut and moulded, to make the belly of the bag; another small flat piece for the lid, fastened to the back piece by three brass hinges, and pierced of course with a hole so that fish could be dropped in without opening the lid. The whole shape of the thing as it bellied out was satisfying to the eye, and spoke of a time when craftsmanship was not far removed from art. The colour had darkened with time to that of a much-used football, but the leather was as smooth, and as hard, as polished wood. On the back piece was applied a strong strip of leather, through which the strap might run, and the

face of this was neatly decorated with an incised pattern. Underneath it was cut with a knife the following inscription :—

J. D. ANDERSON.
FROM MY FRIEND IZAAK WALTON.
1646.

Virtuoso paid little attention to the inscription, the work, he presumed, of some ingenious person anxious to give his possession a fictitious value ; but at least it detracted nothing from the bag, which he bought and took home as a fine specimen of seventeenth-century leather work. If there lingered in his mind some faint hope that after all the thing might be what it professed itself, that was a human weakness which he did not unduly encourage. It was only after three weeks that the discovery was made. Some word of the relic had got abroad, and a paragraph appeared in an evening paper, stating that Walton's fishing-bag was to be seen at a curiosity shop in Westminster. Virtuoso, like a good collector, cut out the paragraph—chuckling to himself over the fact that the bag was in other keeping than a dealer's—and pasted it on to the object. Observe again the Providence.

He fixed it, of course, on the inner side of the lid. The whole interior of the leather had been originally painted with a white enamel, so as to admit of the bag being thoroughly cleansed of all scaliness; and this enamel had cracked in every direction with time. Virtuoso was opening the lid to show this to a friend—not the first friend, by many, to whom the trophy had been displayed—and also to call his attention to the paragraph. The friend read the paragraph and said to the astonished Virtuoso: "It's all right; there is the man's name!"

And sure enough—oh, rapture! on the inside of the lid, one on either side of the hole, were branded the consecrated letters, "I. W." It was possible to miss them owing to the cracks of the enamel—impossible to mistake them once they were pointed out.

Here, indeed, was confirmation. The bag had no pedigree. Either it was genuine or it was not. Against the belief that it was genuine stood the antecedent improbability—hardly to be overstated—that such a relic should so long have survived unnoticed. But the improbable is always happening. Moreover, the lettering of the

exterior inscription looked like a modern hand. But, *per contra*, against the theory of forgery stood almost inseparable objections. First, was it possible to give to the initials *inside* the cover that extraordinary appearance of old age? Secondly, if the thing had been forged, was it conceivable that the very point and essence of the forgery should come to be so completely overlooked that a dealer could sell the bag in absolute ignorance that the initials existed? Those two arguments alone seemed to dispose of the idea. Others presented themselves on further thought. Was it likely that any forger should bestow upon the supposed recipient a name not to be traced in Waltoniana (so far as my investigation of elaborate indices has gone)? Or was it at all probable that the date would be one prior and not subsequent to the publication of the *Compleat Angler?* In 1646 seven years had yet to run before the immortal work saw the light.

So far the proof is negative, and merely shows the improbability of forgery. But one can get a step farther. What was Walton doing in 1646? Is there any reason assignable why he should part from a cherished

possession? There is. Anthony Wood states that in 1643 Walton, whose friends and sympathies were Royalist, left the troubled and unfriendly atmosphere of London for a country retreat at Stafford. But it has since been shown (by Nicolas) that Wood's date is wrong. In December 1645 Walton was in London. It is known, of course, that he was in Stafford, and after the battle of Worcester the King's George, saved from the enemy, was committed to no other person than Walton to hand over to Colonel Blagne for safe custody. I suggest, then, that the date of his departure from London was in 1646, and that in making a clearance of his effects, and in seeking for mementoes to bestow on valued friends, he was led to make this gift to J. D. Anderson. That Walton used a bag is happily beyond dispute, and used it, like many another man, to carry more things than fish.

Listen to Piscator. "My honest scholar, it is now past five of the clock; we will fish till nine and then go to breakfast. Go you to yonder sycamore tree and hide your bottle of drink under the hollow root of it; for about that time and in that place we will

make a brave breakfast with a piece of powdered beef, and a radish or two, that I have in my fish-bag."

Yet the bag was not universal, for Cotton in a very similar passage of the Second Part mentions his "fish-pannier." Another fact may have some bearing on the matter—that about 1646 Walton married for the second time, and heaven knows what far-reaching revolution that may have worked in his personal furniture.

I do not think further argument is needed; the thing is, to a plain man's intelligence, beyond dispute. Virtuoso possesses a most enviable relic; we fishermen are a devout folk, we cherish the literature of our pastime; Cobbett's cricket guides are not better known than the classics of the angle. And surely to anglers this belonging of the patron of our craft should be a thing hardly less venerable than the sacred Kaabah towards which the Mahomedan would look in his devotions. Virtuoso does well to suppress his name, or the steps of his house had like to become a highway of pilgrimage.

Yet, I confess, one thing is wanting to complete satisfaction. There is the bag,

with fair round belly, not immoderate, and yet ample to contain your "great logger-headed chub," or such a trout as that Piscator showed to his disciple for the first-fruits of his skill with the nobler fish: a fish that was warranted "to fill six reasonable bellies"; that was twenty-two inches long when it was taken, and "the belly looked some part of it as yellow as a marigold, and part of it as white as a lily"—and "yet methinks looks better in this good sauce," says Piscator. In that description the fish survives; the bag is here to testify; but who was J. D. Anderson? The boon that fortune may still have in store for Virtuoso is the discovery, first of some further connecting evidence between Walton and a person of that name, and then—but that I fear is impossible—the demonstration that the man to whom the angler, leaving London, consigned the bag that had so often swung from his shoulders as he stretched his legs up Tottenham Hill on the way to Ware and the banks of the Lea, was no other than his honest disciple, Piscator of the book.

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